

WHY NOT ME: DEVELOPING FEMALE LEADERSHIP
THROUGH TRANSFORMED PERCEPTIONS OF
SELF-WORTH AND SELF EFFICACY

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ABSTRACT

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The context is Ward Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Florissant, Missouri. Women in the context were hesitant to assume church leadership. The project assessed if a model to enhance understanding of influences on development of self-worth and efficacy was developed then transformation in perception of leadership would occur. Methodology was a six-week small group study of biblical, historical and societal constructs and images of womanhood, utilizing pre and post-surveys, teaching, discussion, examination of scripture, journaling and evaluation. Six of seven participants indicated changed perception of leadership ability and a willingness to assume leadership in the church.

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To God be the glory for the great and wonderful thing God has done! Only God! To my parents LeRoy (deceased) and Martha Miller, I am because of what you instilled in me that I could become. To my children, Justin (Samyra), Alexia (Darryl), Amanda and awesome grandchildren, Mya, Jaxon, Sameer, Xander and Jalani, you are the wind beneath my wings.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God, who is my everything, LeRoy and Martha Miller, my parents, my beloved husband Joseph Anderson, our children, grandchildren and to every woman who has struggled to believe that she was enough and answer the question “Why Not Me.”

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INTRODUCTION

Coming to grips with the idea that the author was enough just as God created her was not an easy lesson to learn. Despite growing up in a loving and supportive environment, in which values were constantly affirmed by her parents, there lingered within doubts about worth and ability to be successful in the various endeavors of life. These doubts which exhibited as diminished self-esteem prevented the author from willingly accepting positions of leadership out of fear someone might notice that their faith in her ability to successfully accomplish the ascribed goal or outcome had been misplaced. The author was able to recognize that the hesitancy of many of the women within her congregation to assume leadership positions originated from a place of diminished self-esteem and self-worth. The struggle to embrace their inherent worth was evident through recitations of their perceived shortcomings without acknowledging positive personal attributes when presented with opportunities for leadership or accolades. It was also evident that many associated their self-worth with past failures or shortcomings as well as external indicators of success rather than from their status as God's creation. This was the catalyst to discover examples of transformed self-perception in scripture, history and society.

Within scripture, the author identified examples of transformed of self-perception which were foundational to the "Why Not Me" model of leadership development in several texts. However, the story of Jesus' encounter with the Woman at the Well in

John 4:4-29 provided greatest insight into how acceptance and grace filled interactions initiate transformation of self-perception and self-worth. Through engagement with the biblical text, the author discovered the power of confronting and reconciling one's past in a safe space as a means of initiating healing and transformation of self-perception. The biblical text provided the context for developing a model for transformation and understanding of self-worth as an inherent value granted to humanity through their designation as those created in God's own image and loved unconditionally by God. Examination of the historical influences and constructs of identity and race as it pertained to black womanhood provided insight into the struggle of black women to develop methods of affirming and validating their worth within a society which was often denigrating and degrading. The Black Women Club Movement provided a blueprint for deconstructing negative stereotypes through mentoring and creating mutually respectful spaces for intentional study and mentoring as a means of promoting positive self-development. From the author's personal journey, she recognized the value of participating in small group focused studies which addressed issues of self-esteem and worth from both biblical and historical perspectives as a viable method for initiating transformative thinking.

As the scripture provided the biblical foundation womanist theology provided a practical theology approach to the project. The assumption was if women were to embrace the concept of their worth being rooted in the concept of being made in the image of God, they would need practical tools to assist in discovery of the correlations between the sacred text and their lived experiences. Womanist theology provided the opportunity for women to explore familiar text, find the synergy between the biblical

stories and their own lives and develop the ability to embrace and share their own stories as a means of promoting healing and positive self-perception. Additionally, womanist theology further validated the Black Women's Club focus on importance of sharing and exploring the meaning of lived experiences within the framework of faith development as integral to the development of a positive self-identity and worth. Positive Psychology and the theory of Social Comparison reinforced the design of the project to assist women to identify the factors which had influenced their self-worth while providing opportunities for validation of strengths and abilities.

The research resulted in the development of a model of leadership development through transformed understanding of self-worth and efficacy. The project design incorporated small group study, reflection, discussion and journaling. An evaluative process of qualitative indicators and tools were used to help determine the effectiveness of the project. The following chapters will illuminate the research, project development, implementation and evaluation of the "Why Not Me" Model for Developing Female Leadership through Transformed Perceptions of Self-Worth and Self-Efficacy."

Chapter One integrated the analysis of the context and the author's spiritual autobiography to identify areas of synergy. The point of intersection of her lived experiences and the identified area of concern within the context became the focus of this project.

Chapter Two explored the biblical foundation for the project. A study of the story of Jesus' encounter with the Woman at the Well in Samaria provided insight on the power of grace as a tool for transformation.

Chapter Three investigated the role of the Black Women's Club Movement in deconstructing the image of ideal womanhood which had perpetuated the dehumanization of black women as a model for transformation of self-perception.

Chapter Four evaluated the need for women to find liberation from patriarchal interpretations of scripture which have been used to devalue the role of women in church and society. Womanist theology provided the basis for a framework for women to learn to embrace and articulate their faith journeys.

Chapter Five studied various theoretical approaches which promote self-examination as a model for transformation of self-perceptions. These theories were integrated with the concept of the small group model of the Black Women's Club Movement to produce the project implementation process for transformation.

Chapter Six outlines the project implementation process. Data collected during implementation was evaluated and shared to assess effectiveness of project. Information gathered will be presented for instruction and evaluation of potential for replication in different contexts.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

This chapter will identify and explore areas of intersection between ministry interests, subjective experiences and the current ministry context. A review of the spiritual autobiography and the contextual analysis will provide the basis for identifying areas where there are similarities in the context and previous subjective experiences which have impacted my ministry interests. The identification of these synergies will provide the foundation for a ministry project to address a specific need within the context allowing for the utilization and expansion of current ministry skills and strengths.

Context

Upon the assignment of the current context I found a congregation which had experienced deep hurt and severely decreased membership due to a recent unexpected split. This was the second time the church had experienced the loss of members and a pastor due to separation from both the church and the denomination. There was fear over the stability and viability of the church. There was anger towards the episcopal leadership who they felt should have intervened to assist with the fiscal issues as well as more oversight of the pastor. They were weary of new pastoral leadership and a degree of mistrust was present based upon their most recent experiences. There was a notable

disconnect from the conference and episcopal district. During the previous two administrations, the congregation had not actively participated in conference or episcopal district events nor had they developed reciprocal relationships with the other AME churches within the conference. This contributed to the congregation's perception that they had been abandoned by the connectional church once they fell upon difficult financial times.

Additionally, many were disillusioned with what is perceived as the uncertainty of the itinerant system of the AME church in which a pastor is assigned annually to a congregation. The itinerancy can be unsettling for persons who join from other faith communities whose traditions allow pastors to remain until they chose to leave. This sense of pastoral uncertainty was a contributing factor in the considerable number of persons who left the church to follow Rev. Sanders. Some of the remaining members stated that people had grown tired of not knowing from year to year who would be assigned to Ward Chapel. The members who remained were primarily lifetime members with deep ties to the church who felt obligated to stay despite their spiritual weariness and sense of betrayal. The congregation has been aging but in recent years has begun to attract some younger members particularly single mothers with young children.

The first major divide and decline in membership of the church came after their longest tenured pastor Reverend Ann McMillan was relieved of her appointment in 2004. She had been appointed as the first female pastor of the church in 1983 when the church was in a predominately African American community of North St. Louis County known as Kinloch, Missouri. Under her administration and pastorate, the mortgage was liquidated on the church in Kinloch. Ward Chapel was founded in Kinloch in 1910 and

remained a viable part of the community for over seventy years. A 1988 decision by St. Louis County and the Airport Authority to expand the airport runways ultimately affected the Kinloch community and Ward Chapel as their properties were purchased under eminent domain causing them to relocate further north to Florissant, Missouri.

The congregation purchased property at 11410 Old Halls Ferry Rd, Florissant, Missouri in 1990 and worshipped in the house on that site until the new church was built. The congregation at that time was less than thirty members. The church was completed and a dedication and cornerstone laying ceremony were held on June 21, 1992. Reverend McMillian served as pastor for the next twenty-one years growing the church to over one hundred members until she became ill. During the 2004, Annual Conference, Reverend Ann was forced into mandatory retirement because of health challenges by the bishop. She was very vocal in protesting the retirement believing she was still capable of fulfilling her duties. She left the denomination and many families left the church due to anger and disillusionment. Reverend McMillan eventually started a small non-denominational church never reconciling her differences with the AME church before her death in 2010. The members continue to speak of her commitment to the church to the point of making substantial personal financial contributions including the purchasing of property to house a daycare center which would come to be known as Grandma's House. Reverend McMillan is still held in high regard by those members who remained at Ward Chapel although my perception from conversations is her leadership style was rather authoritarian. She had worked many years as a school principal. It appears that the counterbalance to her authoritarianism was her generous and giving spirit. Members often talk about all she did for them, their families and the families in the community.

One of the ministers on staff said “she was tough because she had to be considering she was one of the few female pastors in our district. She had to be able to hold her own with the men.”

The second major split of the congregation occurred in 2011, when the church was no longer able to meet their financial obligations and fell behind in their mortgage payments. In 2004, after the retirement of Reverend McMillan, Reverend M. Sanders was assigned to Ward. He was successful in growing the membership and having a vibrant youth ministry. Maintenance and upkeep of the physical properties on the main campus and at the day care center were completed. However, during this time the balloon mortgage which the church had obtained to finance the building of the fellowship hall became due causing a tremendous financial strain on the congregation. The church entered into an agreement with the bank to resolve the deficit but fell behind in their monthly payments. The bank sold the mortgage to a finance company who began forbearance procedures. A trustee of the church Mr. Rollins stated Reverend Sanders took a hands-off approach to resolving the fiscal crisis leaving it in the hands of the congregation. In 2011, Reverend Sanders severed ties with the AME church to plant a new congregation taking many of the members of Ward with him. The congregation size went from two hundred to fifty. A new pastor was assigned who left after six months again causing an exodus of members leaving only twenty-five committed members.

The current context consists of forty youth under the age of seventeen. There are 122 adults defined as anyone over the age of eighteen. The mean age of adults is sixty which is considerably higher than the median age of the community, however there are only twenty-two between the ages of twenty-five and forty. The congregation is

composed primarily of persons with high school diplomas who work in blue collar factory and service jobs although a considerable number of the members are retired or close to retirement age. Approximately ten percent have advanced degrees and are employed as educators and managers. The percentage of youth under age nineteen is 13.5% which is 14% less than that of the community. The distribution of youth includes two infants, five toddlers, twenty-four school ages seven to twelve and nine between the ages of thirteen to seventeen. There are seven female headed households with children under the age of eighteen, average number of children per household is two. We have six two-parent families where the parents are under the age of forty and the children under thirteen. The average number of children in these households is three. The mothers and children come to church regularly while the fathers are only occasional attendees to worship. There are nine young adults between the ages of eighteen to twenty-six, four attend college out of town, two in town and one works full time. Of the nine young adults, eight are female and one male.

Under my pastorate, the church has resolved all outstanding debts except the mortgage. The mortgage was successfully renegotiated to a manageable payment and the church has been rebuilding its credit standing. The church has been able to meet its financial obligations as well as make improvements to the property. The ability to meet obligations resulted from developing a trusting relationship with the congregation and they were able to see that I was fully committed to their success.

In my assessment, the sense of family is a very positive strength of the congregation but can also be one of its greatest weaknesses. It is a strength because of the spirit of unity it provides in the church which translates into the hospitality and caring

which is evident to those who visit. However, it can also be a deficit in that it inhibits their participation in activities sponsored by other churches within the AME conference and their desire to actively evangelize within the community. One member stated one of the reasons it is difficult to get people to participate outside the church is because until I arrived, they felt isolated and left out. This viewpoint was based on their size and original location in an economically depressed area. This perceived isolation manifested in their communal lack of confidence that the church was a valuable part of the conference. This seems in conflict with the fact that it is ranked as the third church on the presiding elder district which is a ranking of influence.

There is an identified need to focus on the mental and emotional health needs of the congregation. Particularly among the women, several of whom have admitted to struggling with depression, low self-esteem and self-worth due to past experiences of abuse, bullying, failed relationships and feeling overwhelmed with life. It has been noted that there is a need to provide support for the single mothers who are struggling with parenting. Some without adequate support systems in their homes or families. There have been two instances of two young women who have contemplated suicide. They verbalized having entertained thoughts of suicide due to feelings of depression. In public settings like church and Bible study both are extremely quiet; they do not easily interact in groups and rarely contribute to dialogue unless asked. One pre-teen struggle with anger management which has caused disruptions in her education, home and at church. We have implemented two programs to provide opportunities for spiritual growth through a women's Bible study targeted towards young adult women and a program called women empowering women. There appears to be a need for more

intergenerational opportunities to share and discuss relevant issues in a safe and confidential environment.

It can also be difficult to develop leaders in this context and requires the ability to discern, identify, and encourage reluctant leaders who often sit in the pews hesitating to get involved. This reluctance is most evident among the female congregants who often use statements such as “I’m a background person I’m not an upfront person,” “just let me help, I don’t want to be in charge” “I don’t know how to do that” “I can’t talk in front of people” to avoid assuming leadership roles in the church.

A brief survey of ten questions was done of the thirty-nine female members of the church. The members surveyed were between the ages of eighteen and sixty. The purpose of the survey was to gain an initial understanding of how the women of the church perceived themselves particularly around the issue of self-esteem. Thirteen surveys were completed which represents a thirty-three percent return rate. The vehicle used was SurveyMonkey, a web-based survey site. They were told their responses would remain anonymous even to the surveyor therefore the only demographic information requested was the age range of the participant. There were five respondents between the ages of twenty and thirty, two between the ages of thirty-one and forty, none between the ages of forty-one and fifty and six between the ages of forty-one and fifty-nine.

When asked how they would rate their current level of self-confidence and self-esteem five indicated their current level of self-confidence was high; seven rated as average and one rated as low. When asked to rate their level of self-confidence during their teen or young adult years one responded high, four rated as average and eight rated as low. Only one respondent commented stating “I was skinny, dark and had a broken

tooth. I didn't like me much." Eight responded that they were actively engaged in organizations while in school, and five indicated they were not. Fifty-four percent indicated they had been raised in a two-parent home and felt this had contributed to their level of self-confidence and self-esteem. However, a limitation of this question is that it did not ask the respondents to indicate if the influence was positive or negative. It is also noted that it does not allow for respondents to specify if they were raised in two-parent or single-parent household.

Participants were asked if they ever experienced a time when they felt their level of self-esteem prevented them from pursuing a dream, a job, a relationship or other, with eleven responding yes and two no. One commented that she never felt smart enough to compete with others and it impacted her in school and on her job.

They were asked to indicate whether their family had been involved in a faith community in their early years. Ten responded that yes while three stated they had not been raised in a faith community. When asked if they thought the church has a history of developing and supporting women, five answered yes, six no and two did not answer. Several persons left comments including one stated she was raised Baptist "where women were told what to do by the men." She wrote that she felt women's opinions and suggestions were not valued and she did not see women holding leadership positions in the church. Three comments all mentioned having role models of the women in church but primarily in roles assigned for women such as Missionary, Sunday School Teacher, Usher and Choir member. One person responded that she grew up in an environment which valued women and that she was always surrounded by women in leadership

positions. One mentioned that she grew up in the African Methodist Episcopal church and frequently saw strong female leaders including her former pastor.

The final question asked them to indicate in which situations they felt the most confident and self-assured. Six responded that they were most confident in one to one conversations. Four persons indicated they were most comfortable in small group settings, one in large groups and two felt most comfortable when speaking before a group.

Despite this being a small survey sample the results suggest that issues of self-esteem and self-confidence are not limited to a specific age group. Also, of note were some of the comments associated with the question concerning the history of the church in developing and supporting women. Several respondents commented that they had not been exposed to women in key leadership roles in the church as they were growing up. Others mentioned most of the women in leadership within the church were in roles which have traditionally been led by women such as the Missionary Society, Ushers or choir but not key decision-making positions. They also noted that historically women have not been assigned to the larger congregations despite being academically prepared.

Ministry Journey

The journey to ministry for me was a long and winding road which covered a five-year period. Much of my hesitation with acknowledging a call to ministry was grounded in my insecurities and introvert personality. Most my youth and young adult life had been spent trying to avoid being noticed and this call to ministry was in direct conflict to what was comfortable and acceptable for me. There was the wrestling with

feelings of self-confidence and unworthiness in addition to the fear of public speaking. However, after five years of wrestling with God, I finally accepted the call to ministry. After delivering my trial sermon in April of 2004, with three others who had accepted their call to ministry, my pastor said he would only recommend two people to the Board and I was not one of them. It was very disappointing. I questioned the veracity of my call and the prospect of dropping out loomed large as those long-buried feelings of self-doubt, insecurity, fear of speaking, fear of being wrong and fear of being noticed began to resurface. However, God got my attention late one night when reaching for the Bible it fell open to a passage of scripture. It was like a scene in a movie when only the lines they want emphasized are visible on the page. That night those words were “how long will you wander o unfaithful daughter” Jeremiah 31:22. Tears flowed as I begged God to forgive me and promised to do whatever was required. If I had to wait so be it the time for running was over and so in August of 2005, my seminary journey began with relocating to Atlanta, Georgia to attend the Interdenominational Theological Center.

An area of ministry which has always been of interest for me is the area of women’s ministry. Even before I had a clear understanding of the nature of mentoring, I understood the importance of developing relationships with other women. These relationships were both nurturing and challenging in promoting intellectual, spiritual and emotional growth. From subjective experiences, came an understanding of the importance and value of supportive same gender relationships. The importance of these relationships, in helping one to maintain a sense of balance and direction, is evident particularly during challenging times. Through these nurturing relationships there were women who discerned the potential for leadership in me. They were intentional and

instrumental in helping me to recognize and develop those abilities. In the early stages of ministry discernment there was the desire to impact the lives of other women. Beginning with the development of a women's conference prior to entering seminary highlighted the need for mentoring and intergenerational sharing.

The training and experiences gained through pastoral care and CPE (continuing pastoral education) classes provided training in the art of active listening for understanding. This helped me to be able to discern spoken and unspoken needs of both the congregation and individuals in my ministry context. I participated in developing a program to mentor young women through a fellowship with Black Women in Church and Society. This experience taught me how to assess and develop programming to meet a specific population group. My seminary experience enhanced and reinforced how important intergenerational mentoring and wisdom sharing is when developing a healthy self-image and self-worth. Classes in womanist and liberation theology opened my eyes to the challenges and impact systems of oppression have on women in general but particularly women of color. It was the beginning of an awareness of the concept of intersectionality: how race, gender, socioeconomic and cultural factors impact women of color. Through womanist theology grew an understanding of the ways in which the development of self-image and self-worth can be influenced by the interpretation, preaching and teaching of the ancient texts particularly those dealing with the images and roles of women.

My time in seminary was tremendously enriched by the relationships cultivated with other students and especially the young women. My apartment was often the place for studying, storytelling, wisdom sharing, tears, comforting and laughter as they referred

to me as the resident mom and counselor. Many weekends after studying, we would have an impromptu sleep over where questions of love, future and dreams were freely shared. They were times of intergenerational sharing and learning on both sides. Another observation was the impact and benefit of the creation of safe places where women can share openly. Additionally, these safe spaces afforded space to wrestle with the traditional interpretation of sacred texts and the implications for us as women in an ever-changing world. Anne Wimberly and Maisha Handy state:

Discovering wisdom to survive and thrive amidst crushing blows of racism, sexism, and class exploitation has defined the journey of black women since their arrival on the shores of America...Indeed, wisdom needed for black females growth, maturity, and resilience in the face of adversity has been passed on from generation to the next by wisdom guides.¹

The time spent as a student chaplain at the state women's prison highlighted the need for positive female mentoring and peer to peer interactions as a vehicle to assist in the development of identity and worth. Many of the women freely shared how they had no one to guide them or provide advice as they were growing up. They often expressed feelings of unworthiness, self-doubt, self-hatred and shame. Many of them thirsted to better understand themselves and to move past the shame and self-doubt which they communicated often led to poor decision making. Watching as they worshipped in the chapel on Sunday evenings and the raw emotions released reinforced the healing, reconciling and restorative power of the Gospel when shared. The response to the retelling of some of the biblical stories through a womanist lens opened new possibilities

¹ Anne E. Streaty Wimberly and Maisha I. Handy, "Conversations on Word and Deed: Forming Wisdom Through Female Mentoring," in *In Search of Wisdom: Faith Formation in the Black Church*, ed. Anne E. Streaty Wimberly and Evelyn L. Parker (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 1924, Kindle.

for spiritual and emotional growth for many of the women. They were able to relate to the struggles and disappointments while experiencing the reconciling nature of the text.

During the five years in this current context, the diversity of skills developed over time have been invaluable in helping to heal and reestablish trust with the congregation. One of the most important skills which has been invaluable in ministry is the ability and understanding of how to work with persons who volunteer their time. Moving from managing paid staff to leading volunteers was not an easy transition especially when you are one who likes to get things done a certain way. Gaining an understanding of what motivates others to give freely of themselves is absolutely necessary when helping to facilitate moving a congregation from a place of mistrust to trust from brokenness to wholeness.

Being placed in difficult pastoral situations early in ministry has been a blessing and a curse. However, I have learned to trust God for the impossible and to leave room for God to do the unexpected. Patience is an area for continual growth and necessary in the practice of ministry particularly in a context where trust must be earned over time. The road to ministry has truly been a faith journey of hills and valleys, moments of great clarity and moments of great confusion, of learning to love and forgive self and others.

Synergy

My subjective experiences with being a single mother as well as experiences of insecurity and limited self-esteem early in life provide a unique insight and perspective. In working with the women in this context there are parallels to my own experiences of being a single mother and not feeling that there was much support through the church.

Some of the difficulties they experience with being able to attend Bible studies at traditional times due to childcare issues are the same issues which were prevalent when raising my son. Also, because church focuses so much on traditional family often it was and is difficult to feel engaged when your family is not the traditional two-parent household. It is easy for me to relate to the feelings of insecurity, self-doubt and lacking the confidence to fully engage in positions of leadership and the internal struggle it caused. The insights and perspectives gained from my lived experiences, successes and failures may prove invaluable in assisting others in growing and moving toward greater self-confidence and actualization. Having developed an ability to move beyond previous hurts and disappointments has created a willingness and desire to do the same for others. The ability to be transparent in sharing stories of personal successes and failures, insecurities and challenges has proven instrumental in facilitating dialogue across generations in a trusting environment.

When looking at the current context considering my past experiences, it is evident to me the role that the church plays in the development of self-image and self-esteem. Although we often preach and talk about the "*imago dei*," the image of God in many of our churches we continue to perpetuate a patriarchal image of God which can be a deterrent to the development of a healthy self-image in women. It is difficult to imagine self as fearfully and wonderfully made in God's image when the only image you are shown is masculine. There is also the issue of the way sacred texts which deal with women are often preached and taught within the church. In many instances, the sacred text has been used to shame and silence women. This silencing can lead to feelings of invisibility, passivity, inability to trust your own experiences and authority, feelings of

low self-esteem, depression and alienation from church and society.² It is the internalization of often subtle messages of shame and unworthiness which can significantly impact a person's sense of self-esteem and self-confidence. Too often, even in the church, we have not made space for people to be their authentic selves, to speak freely of the things which hold them emotionally and spiritually captive. Nor do we provide space for women, particularly women of color to understand God amid their lived realities.

The process of moving from low esteem to a place where one can begin to embrace the fullness of who you are cannot be done in a vacuum. It is done in community through the nurturing received from others. Audre Lorde reminds us that “the need and desire for women to nurture one another is not pathological but redemptive and it is within that knowledge that our real power is achieved.”³ Paula Buford emphasizes the importance of being in community when she states, “We are created in God's image to be in relationship, to embody God's acceptance within our own human relationships. Paradoxically only through community with others do we truly understand ourselves as individuals.”⁴ Based on my own lived experiences being in community with other women and sharing stories afforded the opportunity to explore places of hurt, fear

² Elizabeth Liebert, “Coming Home to Themselves: Women's Spiritual Care,” in *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care*, ed. Jeanne Stevenson Moessner (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 259.

³ Audre Lorde, “The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House,” University of California Los Angeles, accessed May 19, 2017, http://bixby.ucla.edu/journal_club/Lorde_s2.pdf.

⁴ Paula Buford, “Women and Community: Women's Study Groups as Pastoral Counseling,” in *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care*, ed. Jeanne Stevenson Moessner (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 286.

and self-doubt in a safe and nurturing environment. It afforded the opportunity to realize that the issues were not limited to my experiences but that some were universal.

A text which was instrumental in providing an entry point for me to begin the journey of moving past fear and feelings of unworthiness was the story of the Woman at the Well found in the fourth chapter of John's Gospel. It was after hearing it preached by women that I began to revision the story differently from how it had been learned in Sunday School and from hearing male preachers. It opened the door to interrogate the text to identify the woman's voice and the backstory which was not always made clear in preaching. Hearing women share the story of the Samaritan woman from a womanist perspective opened the door to exploring questions of shame, hurt, guilt, self-doubt and forgiveness through a different lens. Being able to discuss the text in a safe group with women who had experienced some of the same emotions was liberating. It became a journey of self-discovery through familiar texts. It allowed for self-discovery in the biblical story rather than viewing the text as an outsider looking in. Another foundational scripture in helping to define my sense of self and self-worth as a beloved child of God is found in Psalm 139:13-14 "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well."⁵ Through these words the ability to revision myself as acceptable to God became possible.

The question it raises is: what would it look like if the church would be intentional in providing tools and strategies for promoting positive self-image through wisdom sharing, workshops and Bible study in women? At the completion of the

⁵ Biblical citations within this document are from the New International Version unless stated otherwise, Psalms 138:13-14.

program would the tools and strategies provided promote enhanced self-esteem and confidence in their ability to assume leadership positions?

The initial concept of the program is the development of an intergenerational women's training on leadership. Using both the biblical text and writings by women on the meaning of the text women would explore the topics of leadership and self-image. A shared leadership approach would be used in which at each meeting a different woman would be encouraged to lead the discussion after the teaching. The researcher would provide guidance and mentoring for the discussion leader. This would afford opportunities to function in a leadership role within a small and controlled environment to improve self-confidence. Training would be held weekly over a six to eight-week period. Sessions would be divided into a teaching segment followed by reflection and discussion. Journaling would be encouraged on the part of participants. Most sessions would be held in the church however one to two sessions could be held in more intimate environments like the homes of the women. The reason for the rotation of sites would be to facilitate dialogue as some women may be more willing to share in a space which is less formal than the church. Additionally, women have often gathered in nontraditional settings to engage in wisdom sharing. The concept is the re-creation of 'the kitchen table' around which women often gathered to talk and wisdom share. The desired outcome would be the development of women willing to assume positions of leadership in the church and community who have been empowered through a renewed sense of self-worth and self-confidence.

Conclusion

In the context, there is an identified need for the empowerment of female members through renewed self-confidence and an enhanced of self-worth. It has been noted that diminished self-worth and confidence has inhibited the engagement of females into positions of leadership in the church. The need for more engagement of female leadership is necessary because the context composition is eighty percent female. This means many leadership positions traditionally filled by males are vacant. There is a need for the females in the church to assume leadership in roles traditionally held by men. The hesitancy of the females to assume leadership appears to be related to a diminished self-worth and self-confidence in their ability to lead. The communal sense of diminished worth based on the size of the congregation, the original geographic location, past leadership and its past relationship with the conference may also be a contributing factor to an individual's sense of worth.

There is an identified need to empower females in the church who exhibit diminished self-worth and self-confidence to facilitate development of a healthy self-worth and embrace of personal power. If Ward Chapel AME creates and implements a ministry model to facilitate discovery and identification of self, transformation and empowerment of female members will occur.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

This project focuses on the development of female leadership in Ward Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). In a congregation which is approximately eighty percent female there is a need for women to assume nontraditional leadership roles within the church. It has been noted that there is a reluctance among the women to assume leadership roles. When asked to assume leadership roles, the response frequently given is “Not Me,” indicating that they are more comfortable working anonymously in the background rather than embracing the opportunity to lead. This response is often the coded language used by women who have the ability but lack the self-confidence and sense of self-worth to move from their place in the background to foreground. This reluctance has created a leadership vacuum in the church and places the responsibility for leadership upon a limited number of individuals.

This project will introduce the “Why Not Me” model of leadership development through personal transformation. The purpose is to encourage and empower women to assume leadership roles within the church. The term “Why Not Me” is the positive declaration of a person’s understanding that who they are is more than enough to accomplish the tasks before them. The term “Why Not Me” suggests that one has come to understand that who they are is enough and asserts a belief in one’s sufficiency based

on the sufficiency of God's power and grace at work within. This is a powerful assertion, fueled on both a conscious and subconscious level. The embrace of "Why Not Me" signifies that the participant feels they are as qualified as anyone for the tasks they will assume. "Why Not Me" therefore becomes the counter response to "Not Me."

The New Testament text which will provide the biblical foundation for the research project is John 4:4-29, with emphasis on verses 28-29a, which states:

But he had to go through Samaria. So, he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." . . . Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!"

In seeking a text which would speak to the issue of the liberation and transformation of self-concept as a path to development of a positive self-image, it became evident that a further exploration of this familiar text was necessary. It is anticipated that the text will provide key findings that personal transformation through grace leads to development of a positive self-worth. The author posits that the return to community of a person previously living on the margins, combined with the declarative language of John 4:28-29 is indicative of the transformation of this woman's self-perception and self-efficacy. The nameless woman in John the fourth chapter emerges as a prototypical representation of a woman who suffered from diminished self-image and self-worth, offering an embodied metaphor through which to reflect on the reality of women's diverse

experiences in church and society. Within the biblical text we find the framework for transformation of self-concept and self-efficacy.

In exegeting the text, a focus on the role of shame and sin as integral concepts to the development of self-image and self-worth will be explored. Shame, guilt and self-doubt are shown to negatively impact a person's ability to embrace a positive self-image and self-worth.

This paper will examine current scholarship on the story of the Samaritan Woman. The following components will be examined in this exegesis: analysis of historical and cultural context, analysis of current scholarship and contemporary context, and application of this text to the Doctor of Ministry project. The liberating experience of a woman without a name in John chapter four provides a parallel framework that allows "Why Not Me" to be the curative option for women not only reading but living this text. As there are aspects of traditional interpretive thought with which this writer agrees, the chapter will explore additional interpretations of the text as it relates to the dual revelation which occurs through this interaction with Jesus. Interpretive thought places great emphasis on the revelation of Jesus' true messianic identity; however, in studying the text, the revelation God provided is the importance of self-revelation and re-integration of identity which occurred in the woman as a result of her encounter with Jesus. The author posits that this encounter at the well is not just about revealing who Jesus is, but also about women developing positive self-awareness through identification and understanding of Jesus. This idea will be further explored and developed later in the chapter and will foreshadow the content of the theological chapter.

Analysis of Historical Context

The exact date and location of the writing of John is unknown, although many believe it to have been written in Palestine between 50-120 A.D. The authorship of the book has also been a point of much debate, as many believe the author to be anonymous while others contend that the author was the beloved disciple, John. The book has a high Christological focus on presenting Jesus as the Messiah, the one and only son of God, so “that you may believe.”¹ The narrative storytelling form of this text using anonymous or unnamed characters is designed to engender a connection with characters which allows one to envision themselves as a story participant.

The significance of Samaria as the place of this encounter is important because of the historical conflict between the Jewish people and the Samaritans. Samaria is in the central region of Palestine, north of Jerusalem. Samaria was at one time the capital of Israel under Omri, but eventually fell to the Assyrian army. After the fall, many of the inhabitants of Samaria were sent into exile in foreign lands and foreigners were relocated to Samaria, bringing with them their culture and faith traditions. The enmity between Samaritans and the Israelites can be traced back to the time when the people of Samaria permitted Alexander the Great to build them a temple on Mount Gerizim.² This new temple conflicted with the belief of the Judeans that the only true place of worship was at the temple in Jerusalem. The Samaritan belief in Gerizim as the center or true place of worship and the temple of God traces back to Abraham. After leaving his homeland,

¹ George R. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 36, *John*, ed. Ralph P. Martin (Waco, TX: Word Book Publisher, 1987), lii.

² Gerard S. Sloyan, “John,” in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), 53.

Abraham traveled to Shechem and was told this was the land God had promised to give him. Mount Gerizim is also the location from which Moses (Deut. 33) and Joshua (Josh. 8) bestowed blessings upon the Israelites. The word Gerizim, *tabbur ha'ares* in Hebrew, means center of the land. However, the idea of Gerizim being the place of worship ordained by God was not accepted by the Israelites.

The Israelites denounced relationship with the Samaritan people who they believed were defiled and ritually unclean after their return from Babylon, because of the influence of those who had relocated to Samaria with different cultures and religions. It was believed that the Samaritans had begun to worship other gods through a new, syncretized faith and way of life. The term “Samaritans” was eventually replaced with the term “Samaritans,” imparting a negative designation for the people of Samaria who they viewed as unclean and unacceptable.³

The location of the encounter is also significant because of the role wells and water played in Ancient Near East history. Wells often represented the place of meeting and betrothal in the Old Testament. Three meetings recorded in Genesis 24:10-49, 29:4-14, and Exodus 2:15-22 form the basis of betrothal stories, each involving women coming to the well alone being met by a stranger and eventually marrying. There is no evidence that Jesus was looking for a bride, but it has been suggested that the symbolism is representative of Jesus looking for one who will become a witness to his messianic identity.

³ Sloyan, “John,” 53.

Analysis of the Cultural Context

It has been well documented that in sacred texts women have often been portrayed as being inferior to men. For Samaritan women, this dehumanization and denigration was further compounded by the fact that Samaritan women were considered defiled from birth. Inasmuch as Samaritans as an ethnic group were considered unclean, Samaritan women, unlike Jewish women, who were only considered unclean for a designated period of seven days (Lev. 15:19), carried the stigma of being labeled as menstruants from birth.⁴ It is highly probable in this author's assessment that this labeling also created a culture of shame for women. This perception of Samaritan women being perpetually unclean from birth is what makes Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well so extraordinary and even scandalous. During this time in history, men did not engage in conversations with women in public, not even those with familial ties, based on cultural expectations of acceptable behavior in public settings. Strict adherence to cultural rules of engagement with the opposite sex was expected. Irudaya states that women were inferior to men, and it was considered undesirable for men and or rabbis to talk with a woman, according to Rabbinic literature which she has reviewed.⁵

In general, women were to remain relatively invisible and anonymous, and although there were exceptions, overall, women were subjugated to secondary or subhuman status. Women seldom had an identity apart from that of the male head of household, which is why the conversation around her marital status is significant. Nachev

⁴ R. Irudaya, "Significance of Jesus' Mission with the Marginalized Samaritan Woman: A Feminist Reading of John 4, 1-42," *Bible Bhashyam* 32, no. 2 (2006): 158, accessed August 23, 2018, New Testament Abstracts, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

⁵ Irudaya, "Significance of Jesus' Mission," 156.

explains, “Husband and wife constitute a unity; they supplement each other. A husband in the Mediterranean culture of Jesus heads the family name and a wife completes him, finding her identity in and through him.”⁶ This devaluing of the individuality and personhood of women distinct from men also speaks to the issues of self-efficacy, the belief one has of their power to affect situations based on perceptions of ability and self-worth.

The world of the Ancient Near East was a gender-divided world where the roles and spaces assigned to each were clearly delineated. Public spaces like public squares, were male dominated, while private spaces such as the home were female dominated, females were expected to be silent and invisible in public. Since women were considered inferior, it would not have been unusual for a man to avoid conversing with his wife in public. Jesus’ encounter and engagement of this woman at the well broke every social taboo of the times, particularly as it traversed the boundaries of a shame-based culture where women were expected to be shame-conscious and defensive of their sexual exclusivity.⁷

Although there is only one reference to the marital status of the unnamed woman, “go call your husband” (v16), many sources see this verse as evidence of her immorality and unworthiness to engage in conversation with Jesus. JoAnn Davidson cites several passages from commentators referencing the perceived negative aspects of the woman’s character in her article on the Samaritan woman:

⁶ Antoine E. Nachez, *Women in the Eyes of Jesus: Yesterday, Today and Forever* (New York, NY: Albahouse, 2000), 120.

⁷ Jerome H. Neyrey, “What’s Wrong with This Picture? John 4, Cultural Stereotypes of Women, and Public and Private Space,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 24, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 77-79, accessed August 23, 2018, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

Here was a woman who lived outside the boundaries of any religious or cultural standards of her day. A string of five husbands followed by a lover is certainly not unknown in the twenty-first century, but it is hardly common even in our permissive society with its twisted tolerance for evil. In first-century Samaria, such a domestic arrangement would have been unthinkable. ...In order to receive Jesus' living water, she must deal with the flagrant misuse of her sexuality. ...Jesus finding her not only spiritually obtuse...tries to sober her by confronting her with the shady side of her own life.⁸

These statements highlight the perceived immoral nature of her character, underscoring the societal constructs of purity and shame that support the justification of their judgment about her morality, statements which portray her in a less than favorable manner. Many sermons focus on this woman's multiple marriages and cohabitation with one who was not her husband, intimating that she was a woman of questionable character. Some have even labeled her a prostitute; however, careful analysis of the text does not support this stereotype. There is nothing in the text which would suggest that the woman was a prostitute; however, that has not prevented her from being labeled as such in both scholarly works and in sermons delivered by both men and women. These characterizations of the woman have often been used to shame, subjugate, and compel women in congregations to ascribe to strict standards of chastity and purity which are often not applied to male congregants. Language has the power to "other" and deny the rights of individuals to be recognized as fully human, and to construct and maintain hierarchal systems which portray women as inferior and flawed, particularly when couched in faith or God language. Dr. Jacquelyn Grant affirms the power of language to subjugate and control others when she states, "Sexist/male language that undergirds

⁸ JoAnn Davidson, "John 4: Another Look at the Samaritan Woman," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 43 (2005): 165, accessed August 23, 2018, ATLA Religion Database with the ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

oppressive male/female relationships must be eradicated in order to pave the way for new ways of languaging, imaging, and imagining humanity and divinity.”⁹

These traditional interpretations and commentaries also fail to acknowledge the societal norms surrounding marriage and divorce in the cultural context of the ancient Near East. The predominant view of exegetes who suggest that she is a woman of flawed character is not supported by the text nor the cultural norms of her day. When we look at the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy, we see that divorce was not within the purview of the wife but the husband. It was the husband who could initiate divorce proceedings (Deut. 24:1-4), not the wife. The presumption that she is a woman of questionable moral character does not consider the circumstances which potentially led to her having multiple husbands. It overlooks the possibility that her status could be in the tradition of levirate marriage in which the brother of a deceased man who died without a son would be obligated to marry the widow of his brother (Deut. 25:5), as in the story of Tamar (Gen. 38). This was often done to protect the dowry which was given at the time of the first marriage so that the inheritance stayed in the family. Although during this time there were not civil marriage ceremonies, the presentation of a dowry on behalf of the woman became the marital contract. There were times when a woman may not have had a dowry and a couple would choose to cohabitate as a public sign to the community of their marital status.¹⁰

⁹ Jacquelyn Grant, “The Power of Language and the Language of [Em]Power[ment],” *The Journal of the ITC* (2006): 88.

¹⁰ Lynn H. Cohick, “The Real Woman at the Well: We Know Her as an Adulteress and Divorcée: Her Community Would Have Known Otherwise,” *Christianity Today* 59, no. 8 (2015): 66–69, accessed August 23, 2018, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

Although divorce was optional, the effects of living in a shame-based culture and consciousness are evidenced in this woman who came to the well alone at an unusual time of the day (v. 6). Historically, the well was the place where women gathered during specific hours of the day to draw water for the family. Like the public square where men gathered, the well was the communal space where women came to share information and experience the bond of sisterhood. It is significant that she came to the well at a time when the other women would have returned to their homes and the probability of encountering them would be limited. This woman also understood that, though the time was unusual due to the strict gender codes under which women would be expected to be working in the home, the possibility of her encountering anyone at the well would have been minimal, freeing her from the anxiety of public shaming. Inyamah suggests that her coming to the well at this unusual time of day is indicative of her internalized belief that she is of less than moral character.¹¹ When one lives with shame and a diminished sense of self-worth, the idea of being around others who may ostracize and criticize you will either directly or indirectly lead you to try to minimize contact. The desire to avoid the glances, disapproving looks, and whispered comments created a desire to limit socialization with even those who would normally be considered peers. It is difficult to “walk with your head high” when feelings of inadequacy or unworthiness are the framework of your self-perception. This desire to avoid the feelings associated with shame frequently cause persons to avoid interacting with those who they believe sit in judgment of their actions as a defense mechanism to preserve some sense of balance and

¹¹ Deborah C. Inyamah, “Contrasting Perspectives on the Role of the Feminine in Ministry and Leadership Roles in John 4 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15,” *The Journal of Religious Thought* 60, no. 2 (2008): 93, accessed August 23, 2018, ATLASerials, Religion Collection, EBSCOhost.

self. However, while the woman sought to avoid contact with others, the text suggests that the meeting at the well had divine intent. The encounter becomes a place of personal transformation for the woman, as the dialogue with Jesus opens the door for both revelation and self-evaluation.

Critique of Current Scholarship on the Samaritan Woman

Biblical interpretation involves engaging the text using all our senses as we attempt to determine the how, when, and why of the writer. As we travel the road of biblical interpretation or hermeneutics, we must realize that we each enter and view text from our own experiential lens. In addition to understanding the cultural context of the times, we must also consider that the context of the interpreter affects how biblical text is read and understood. Place, time, socioeconomic, political, and religious factors as well as the communities in which we live all shape our understanding and interpretation of the biblical text.¹² Additionally, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and age are also contributing factors which influence our interpretation of sacred texts. We must attempt to understand the writer's intent, the intended audience, and the implications for contemporary times. The process requires intentional engagement and questioning of the text to ascertain the intended meaning and the current relevance. In Davidson's "John 4: Another Look at the Samaritan Woman," she states that because of verbal and literary subtleties contained in the Gospel of John, there is a need for reevaluation of the details of the passage, as these details inform interpretation and theological understanding.¹³

¹² Frederick C. Tiffany and Sharon H. Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation: A Roadmap* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 14.

¹³ Davidson, "John 4," 161.

The text begins with the words “he had to go through” Samaria (v. 4). This is an interesting statement considering there were alternative routes Jesus could take to reach Galilee. When traveling between Judea and Galilee, the route through Samaria, though the shortest and most direct, was most often avoided by Jews because of the enmity with the Samaritans. Scholars are not definitive in their interpretation of the words “had to go”; some, like Culpepper and O’Day, suggest the reasons were twofold: geographical and theological. They state that the word translated as “had to” or “must go,” *edei* in the Greek, as used in John’s Gospel, is most often associated with God’s plan.¹⁴ While others, like Davidson and Morris, interpret the words “had to go” or “must go” as indicating that traveling this specific route reflects the divine necessity of God’s plan of salvation for all people. The words “had to go” may also be considered a foreshadowing of the missional aspect of Jesus’ ministry, referencing the Great Commission which Jesus would give to the disciples to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19).

If the words “had to go” indicate a necessity for Jesus to take this route, it can be assumed, therefore, that meeting this woman at the well was not accidental. E. Anne Henning Byfield said of verse four, “the fact that Jesus had to go through Samaria shows that Jesus will go out of his way to get to you.”¹⁵ Where engaging in dialogue with a strange woman in public would have been taboo for others, Jesus’ divine imperative to

¹⁴ Alan R. Culpepper and Gail R. O’Day, “The Gospel of Luke, the Gospel of John,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, 12 vols. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995), 565.

¹⁵ E. Anne Henning Byfield, “O Say Can You See” (sermon, Missouri Annual Conference, Airport Hilton Hotel, St. Louis, MO, October 29, 2018).

“go through Samaria” necessitated the interaction that transpired. Jones-Carmack states, “transcendent moments occur in temporal places.”¹⁶

Traditionally, interpretation of this pericope focuses on several areas: the inclusive nature of Jesus’ ministry, the gift of living water as revelation of Jesus’ identity, redefining true worship, and the nature of evangelism. Scholars including Inyamah, O’Day, Neyrey, and others refer to this text as representative of the inclusive nature of Jesus’ ministry, suggesting that the primary objective of the pericope is a commentary on breaking down the boundaries of ethnic and gender bias. O’Day states that Jesus openly challenges and breaks open two boundaries in this text: the boundaries between the “chosen people” and “rejected people,” and between male and female.¹⁷ They perceive Jesus’ engagement in dialogue with someone who, based on ethnicity, gender, and marital status, was socially unacceptable, as a paradigm shift regarding proper behavior and interaction among various groups. Jesus’ rhetorical act effectively removes the stigma of inferiority or second-class citizenship of the Samaritan people. The purpose of this move was to show that the new kingdom would be inclusive of all people without distinction between “the chosen people” and “the rejected people.” It was a public display signifying the elimination of societal boundaries in a hierarchical system which marginalized and dehumanized individuals based on gender, ethnicity, and religious affiliation.

¹⁶ Joy Jones-Carmack, "Relational Demography in John 4: Jesus Crossing Cultural Boundaries as Praxis for Christian Leadership," *Feminist Theology* 25, no. 1 (2016): 43, accessed August 23, 2018, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

¹⁷ Culpepper and O'Day, "The Gospel of Luke," 9:571.

The discussion about “living water” (4:14) is viewed by many biblical scholars including Neyrey, Davidson, and Irudaya as the means through which Jesus begins to reveal his true messianic identity.¹⁸ The term “living water,” *hydor zon*, was most often used in referring to water which flowed from rivers, streams, or springs, as opposed to water which was collected in a well without access to a spring or tributary. Living water was also often used as a metaphor in the Hebrew Bible for divine activity, and in the New Testament as a metaphor for the Holy Spirit which becomes the fountain of life.¹⁹ Although the unnamed woman initially misunderstands the offer of “living water” which Jesus makes to her through inquisition and revelation, she comes to discern Jesus’ true identity. Nicodemus, an accepted member of society, is juxtaposed against this woman who lives on the margins of society. Her growing understanding of the words of Jesus stand in stark contrast to the continued confusion of Nicodemus (Jn. 3:4-10). Where the person who should be able to approach Jesus during the day comes under cover of darkness and does not appear to gain insight, this woman, living under the stigma of shame, ostracism, rejection, and low expectation, encounters Jesus in the light of day and becomes the first beneficiary of the revelation of Jesus’ identity. This growing enlightenment is demonstrated in the progression of titles with which she addresses Jesus initially by ethnic origin, “how do you a Jew” (4:9), then with the title, Sir (4:11, 15), and finally as Prophet (4:19), denoting the possibility that he is the *Taheb*, the restorer or revealer of truth who the Samaritans believed would be the Messiah.

¹⁸ Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 90.

¹⁹ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (New York, NY: The McMillan Company, 1956), 195.

What has not been fully explored or examined in the readings of this author is the woman's perception and understanding of "living water" not just as something to quench her thirst, but also as a vehicle for restoration and transformation in her life. Irudaya briefly references this developing self-knowledge that evolves from Jesus' identification of himself as living water when she states, "through the woman's developing self-knowledge, Jesus reveals himself as the source of life, the giver of living water."²⁰ However, few scholars analyze the personal transformation of her self-perception, which begins as she comes to understand the meaning of the "gift of life" for her life. Joy Jones-Carmack briefly touches on this transformed self-perception when she writes, "the Samaritan woman is illumined when she comes to know who she is; only when she comes to know herself can she proceed to the knowledge of Christ."²¹ This author agrees that as the dialogue between the woman and Jesus progresses, she begins to see herself not through the lens of the community as unworthy, but as one Jesus has validated as worthy through the sustained interaction.

Another concept which frequently emerges in scholarly analysis of this text focuses on the meaning of true worship, positing here that the text strongly suggests a move from religiosity towards "true" faith and worship of God. Historically, the debate over the divine appointed place of worship, Jerusalem or Gerizim, had been a major point of discord between Jews and Samaritans. This concept of "true" worship would also serve to dismantle societal constructs of worship, as Jesus intimates that worship is not

²⁰ Irudaya, "Significance of Jesus' Mission," 167.

²¹ Jones-Carmack, "Relational Demography in John 4," 49.

bound to geographic or ethnic boundaries, but “true” worship is a spiritual discipline that occurs within an individual.

Neyrey, Irudaya, and Davidson posit that another focus of the text is the missional aspect, which privileges the significance of the woman’s proclamation to the community, “come see a man who told me everything I have ever done” (4:29), and the evangelistic results of her witness to the community, “many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony” (4:39). Davidson writes, “The Samaritan woman became Jesus’ coworker by inviting the men and women of Samaria to find the gift of salvation. In contrast to Jesus’ disciples, who went into the city to buy, she hurried there to spread the news of the ‘Bread of Life.’”²²

In review of literature, what have not been fully explored are the concepts of diminished self-worth and self-efficacy as precipitating factors for the woman’s isolation from community. Nor has there been a focus on the transformational change that occurred after the encounter with Jesus, which allowed her to re-enter society with the confidence to once again “be seen” as she emerges from the stigma of shame under which she has lived, through this intentional encounter with Jesus. In the opinion of this author, where scholarship falls short is in the analysis of the meaning and significance of “leaving her water jar,” returning to the city, and declaring, “Come see a man who told me everything I have ever done!” (4:28-29) as indicative of the personal transformation, self-revelation, and empowerment which has occurred as a result of the interaction between the woman and Jesus.

²² Davidson, “John 4,” 167.

We first encounter the woman arriving at the well to fill a jar with life-sustaining water at an unusual time of day, which we presuppose is related to her feelings of shame and the ostracization of the community. Realizing that water was not plentiful, the daily trip to gather water for the household was a necessity for life. The jar in which the water was collected, therefore, was an invaluable tool to the purpose of her visit; however, after engaging with Jesus, the jar is left behind as her focus has shifted from maintaining physical existence to the “gift of life” Jesus offers. Davidson suggests that as she comes to clarity on Jesus’ identity as the Messiah, she no longer needs the jar because her acceptance of Jesus’ revelation means the promise that she would never thirst again has been fulfilled.²³ Culpepper and O’Day suggest two other distinct meanings for the abandoned jar:

On the level of the plot line, the abandoned water jar provides the link between the two conversations at the well. The woman’s jar will stand before Jesus and the disciples as they speak. Yet the detail also has meaning on a more theological level. The abandoned jar suggests that the woman’s concern of v. 15, the desire for miraculous water, has been superseded by the revelation of Jesus’ identity.²⁴

The fundamental point of departure for this author from these two and other scholarly commentaries’ conclusions regarding leaving the water jar is that none considers the leaving of the water jar as symbolic of leaving the things of her past as she has come into a new revelation of her personhood through this encounter with Jesus. This author posits that the water jar is the symbolic container holding the stigmas of shame, guilt, cultural isolation, gender bias, internalized oppression, diminished self-worth, and low self-esteem which she has carried through life. As she has come to know who she is in

²³ Davidson, “John 4,” 166.

²⁴ Culpepper and O’Day, “The Gospel of Luke,” 569.

relationship to Jesus, she no longer has a reason to carry the burdens of her past; therefore, the jar is no longer necessary because she has now become a vessel to contain the “living water or new life” which Jesus offered to her. Therefore, leaving of the water jar implies that she is no longer bound by the things of her past; rather, she has transcended the negative stereotypes because of the grace extended through her encounter with Jesus. She has become the new creation Paul speaks of, “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new” (2 Cor. 5:17), who no longer needs to carry the symbol of her pain and marginalization. Antoine E. Nachev writes, “Christ transforms the woman who comes to Him into a new creation, maintaining her identity as a woman and as a person, but changing her being into one that lives in and through Him.”²⁵

Her ability to leave the water jar is emblematic of her acceptance of the grace extended to her by Jesus, who engages her not as a despised outsider, but as one who is fully human and worthy of his time and attention. “Grace,” or *charis* in the Greek, is defined as unmerited, undeserved favor given through Jesus Christ. It was this undeserved grace that allowed the conversation between two persons, a male Jew and female Samaritan, who should not have had any interaction with one another. This grace can also be seen in the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37, as a stranger provides care for one who others have ignored and rejected. Where the woman at the well has been treated as not fully human in the past, Jesus extends grace through a public demonstration of acceptance. Additionally, Jesus’ revealing of his identity demonstrates

²⁵ Nachev, *Women in the Eyes of Jesus*, 130.

his recognition of her as one worthy to receive the truth, which becomes the catalyst for personal transformation and empowerment.

Carroll Saussy in *God Images and Self Esteem* writes, “That sense of self-worth will come only when she discovers through mutual, respectful relationship that she is intrinsically valuable. Apart from relationship, there is no recovery of self-worth.”²⁶ The intentional engagement of Jesus in dialogue with the Samaritan woman suggests the development of a relationship built on mutual respect. This mutual respect is evidenced by the willingness of Jesus to address her inquiries without demeaning or denigrating her based on preconceived cultural constructs concerning her character. The development of the relationship and respect can also be seen in the woman’s responses to Jesus through both her desire to know more and her willingness to answer difficult questions with honesty and transparency. Through this engagement and development of a mutually respectful relationship, the woman’s value and worth are affirmed in a manner which allows her to recover a sense of personal value and worth by “leaving her water jar” because she is now the vessel which carries life-giving potential.

As this woman comes to understand who she is in relationship to Jesus, she gains a new perspective of self, free of the constraints of shame. Jesus instructs her to go and get her husband; however, based on this new sense of self and personal empowerment, she boldly reenters community, declaring, “Come and see a man who has told me everything I have ever done!” (4:29). Scholarly voices like Irudaya, Jones-Carmack, and Nacheff affirm the missional and evangelistic emphasis of the text because of the response of the community and possibly the correlation with the Johannine use of the phrase

²⁶ Carroll Saussy, *God Images and Self Esteem: Empowering Women in a Patriarchal Society* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 81.

“come and see” in John 1:39 and 46. Gail O’Day states that there are three components to her witness: an invitation to a personal encounter with Jesus, the sharing of her personal experience, and further exploration of the question of Jesus’ messianic identity.²⁷

Although component three speaks to the possibility that the woman was not fully convinced of Jesus’ identity, the basis of her question will not be explored here; rather, the focus of the discussion is the significance of the personal transformation which empowered her return and declaration of “come and see.” Although this author agrees that the revelation of Jesus’ identity was the impetus for her returning to community to bear witness to what she had experienced, it also seems important to recognize that this would not have been possible without the revelation of self she experienced during her encounter with Jesus.

The author of this chapter posits that the dialogue between Jesus and the woman found in John 4:16-19, the discussion of her marital status, becomes the place of self-revelation leading to transformation. Jesus’ nonjudgmental attitude allows her to acknowledge her situation in a moment of honesty and transparency, free from the vestiges of shame and guilt. The woman came to the well at an unusual time of day for fear of contact with others because of feelings of shame and unworthiness, thereby allowing her to avoid dealing with any conflict which might arise. Carol Saussy references the work of psychologists Richard L. Bednar, M. Gawain Wells, and Scott R. Peterson around issues of self-esteem who conclude that “Self-esteem is achieved if a person chooses coping over avoidance when faced with conflict involving anxiety or fear.

²⁷ Culpepper and O’Day, “The Gospel of Luke,” 569.

People who choose to cope with the problems they face by confronting them feel good about themselves; people who deny or avoid the conflict feel bad about themselves.”²⁸

Jesus’ direct yet non-accusatory questioning would not let her avoid or deny her issues; rather, it led her to confront and reconcile them within herself. This reconciling of her identity was facilitated by Jesus’ acceptance, revelation of his identity as the “I am,” and the offer of new life through faith. As she grew in her understanding and knowledge of Jesus, she was able to discard her past and became free to embrace her full humanity and worth. The words “who told me everything I have ever done” become the testimony to the prophetic identity of Jesus and to the new creation she has become. It is this new sense of self-acceptance that empowered her to risk everything to return to the community, declaring boldly, “come and see, a man who has told me everything I have ever done,” because she has been transformed and liberated from the fear of being exposed. Without the transformed self-perception and the liberative effect of her conversation, it would be questionable whether she would have had the courage to return to public spaces which she had avoided in the past. Therefore, the effectiveness of the missionary outreach was enhanced because her witness was no longer encumbered by the need to avoid or deny who she was.

Contemporary Context

What we see in Jesus’ approach to the woman is not a focus on why she came to the well in the middle of the day, nor on the implications of the timing of her arrival, but a focus on the person. There is no judgment of her character or status as someone

²⁸ Saussy, *God Images and Self Esteem*, 143.

unworthy of having their humanity recognized and acknowledged. Jesus' words affirmed her right to exist as he extended an invitation to enter into a relational space with him which heretofore had been denied her. In contrast to expected norms, Jesus does not ignore her or avoid contact with her; instead, he openly initiates conversation in a way that affirms her dignity and worth. Jesus does not begin the conversation by seeking to denigrate, demean, or make judgments about her character; rather, he views her as someone capable of engaging in civil discourse. The recognition that someone sees her beyond the limitations of the societal stigma under which she had lived becomes the catalyst for her self-discovery. The realization that she did not have to avoid or hide from the man sitting at the side of the well became a moment of empowerment as she embraced the opportunity to become a part of the discourse. Jesus' engagement of the woman was a deliberate break with the cultural expectations which implied that women should be silent in public and that men should not waste time conversing with women. Jesus' invitation, though counter-cultural, freed her to express her curiosity surrounding his intentions and identity freely and honestly.

Jesus began a theological discussion with her that would eventually reveal his identity, while simultaneously creating space for self-reflection and exploration. Although Jesus tells the woman to go and get her husband, it is not done in a condescending or condemning manner; it is done as an invitation to self-evaluation. The words of Jesus, "Go, call your husband, and come back," creates space for a conscious decision on the woman's part to either engage or disengage from the conversation.

The Bible is a book about people's interaction with a Holy God. It chronicles the development of a sacred trust between Deity and people. The Bible demonstrates the

character and nature of God through God's interactions with humanity. It also represents humanity's response to and interaction with the God of their creation. Readers are to find lessons for living within its pages. Stories of women are often framed in a way which casts women in marginalized, anonymous, and supportive roles as told through a patriarchal lens. Traditional biblical interpretation has not always allowed for all voices to be heard, particularly as it relates to the lives of women. In fact, Frederick notes that the narratives of women have been shaped according to the social norms prescribed by a patriarchal society with little regard or attention given to women's realities.²⁹

In recent years, women have begun to view biblical text through the lens of their own lived experiences. This opens a gateway to previously unexplored perspectives, offering new interpretations, understanding, and insights. The text becomes more relevant to the lives of women as the voices of women are amplified beyond the constraints of patriarchy and paternalism. The interpretation and misappropriation of numerous texts have been used to place women in a negative light and have had direct influence on women's self-worth and self-image. Stephen D. Moore references this weaponizing of text in his essay, "Are There Impurities in the Living Water":

Recent Feminist readers of John 4:1-42 have been countering the traditional tendency on the part of male commentators to victimize the Samaritan woman, to reduce her to a sexual stereotype, to patronize her for her intellectual inferiority, thereby providing yet another biblical warrant for the unequal treatment of contemporary women in the church, the academy and the society at large.³⁰

Where many find messages of strength, hope, encouragement, and empowerment in the Bible, the silencing of women's voices has often had the opposite effect. Women often

²⁹ Frederick and Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation*, 36.

³⁰ Stephen D. Moore, "Are There Impurities in the Living Water," in *A Feminist Companion to John*, vol. 1, ed. Amy-Jill Levine (London, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 84.

read biblical texts in a context of patriarchal ideology. Instead of finding healing and empowerment towards freedom from oppression, their own encounters with the text are informed by readings and interpretations which appear to condone and even bless the harm, degradation, and abuse with which they must often live and sometimes die.³¹

Relationship to the Doctoral Project

This text has been chosen because it provides a model for developing female leadership through the transformational change which can occur in a person's life when their personhood has been acknowledged and affirmed. Development of a positive self-worth and self-efficacy empowers individuals to transcend stereotypical boundaries of shame, guilt, and feelings of inadequacy which hinder growth and development. In the "Why Not Me" Model of Leadership Development through Personal Transformation, the experience of the woman at the well provides a foundation for the project model to foster female leadership in the church through the development of positive self-worth and efficacy. Self-worth for the purposes of this chapter refers to what one believes about self and the value of their being which can be either positive or negative. Self-worth is informed by society, personal relationships, and faith. Self-efficacy speaks to a person's understanding of their ability to assume or complete tasks and the degree to which they believe they can accomplish what they have set out to do. How one views oneself in relationship to others and to God informs one's sense of self. Optimally, the measuring stick for evaluating self-worth and efficacy would be informed through an understanding of our relationship with our Creator, as those created in the image of God and dearly

³¹ Carole A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., *Women's Bible Commentary: Expanded Edition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 4.

loved by God. For women, however, the ability to see themselves as worthy of God's love has been hindered through the negative imagery and interpretation of sacred text as it relates to women. This is particularly true for women of color who have rarely been included in the traditional biblical interpretations and scholarly writings referencing their inclusion in the *Imago Dei* or the image of God. Without positive reinforcement of self-worth, women often feel alone, isolated, and inadequate. These feelings of inadequacy impact our relationship with the Divine. When positive self-worth is lacking, it creates distance between God and God's creation, making it difficult to envision one's self as acceptable to God and others when one only sees one's self as flawed and broken and unworthy of the grace that God offers. It then becomes necessary to assist the person to reconcile their past in a way which empowers the development of a positive self-image and self-worth. Additionally, this very necessary assessment provides a relevant segue to the consideration of self-efficacy, which is required to understand how to propel women into positive action relative to or reflective of their sense of self.

The biblical text in John chapter four, the story of Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan Woman at the well, is indicative of how interpretation can be different based on the gender and context of the interpreter. The woman's role in sacred text and this pericope has often been misinterpreted and misrepresented because of preconceived cultural concepts relating to a woman's sexuality, intellect, and interests.³² There are several trains of thought concerning the purpose and intent of this pericope. However, the liberative and transformative effect on the woman's self-perception has not been explored in depth or analyzed in the theological scholarship reviewed for this chapter.

³² Gail R. O'Day, "John: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," *New Interpreter's Bible*, 12 vols. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995), 9:571.

The roles of transparency, affirmation of value, and humanity have not been fully explored as it relates to the development of positive self-perception, self-worth, and self-efficacy. Few of the sources reviewed focused on the transformation of the woman's perception of self-worth which occurred due to Jesus' non-judgmental acknowledgment of her full humanity, which was found to be a pivotal point of discovery for this writer.

The approach for the review of this text was with an intentional focus on the spiritual and emotional healing and reintegration of self that occurred during this interaction with Jesus. It is this writer's assumption that, through this interaction with Jesus, the woman is empowered to claim her voice and lead a community as her humanity and the value of her personhood is affirmed.

This assumption is based on the woman's testimony in verses twenty-eight and twenty-nine: "Then the woman left her water jar and went back into the city. She said to the people, 'Come see a man who told me everything I have ever done!'" This personal encounter became the catalyst for transformation and development of a healthy self-image and sense of self-worth, as she was empowered to reenter society (went back into the city), released her past (dropped her water pot), and embraced a future free of shame and stigma (told me everything). In this conversation, Jesus speaks to her emotional and spiritual needs which have gone unattended. Jesus sees her holistically as fully human, despite her past. Jesus does not ignore her past, label it as bad, nor suggest that she is a sinner—rather, he speaks to her in a matter-of-fact tone, revealing that there is nothing about her that he does not already know which would preclude his entering into conversation. Jesus' openness and nonjudgmental discussion does not silence her; instead, it empowers her to talk openly and honestly about her past and present as she

recognizes that Jesus sees all of her. Through the revelation of her full humanity, inclusive of the “broken parts,” she is provided the tools to begin to re-imagine herself in a new light. What had been viewed as negative or bad has become an integral part of her emotional healing. This dialogue with Jesus liberates and empowers her to reenter the community free of guilt or shame as a full human being. Through this self-discovery of her worth and value, she moves from the margins of society to the center and assumes leadership as a disciple of Jesus, sharing the Good News of transformation, liberation, and restoration with the community.

Women have often struggled to know who they are and develop healthy positive self-images, frequently because they have defined themselves in relationship to others. Here in the text, Jesus shows that our identity lies in our relationship with our Creator. We are often left broken because we do not conform to the standards of others without understanding that the standard for our being is Jesus. Throughout the text it is revealed that Jesus is one who is concerned with restoring broken people to wholeness. Jesus took extreme care in the conversation to not cause further harm to the woman, but rather, to help her to understand herself in relationship to him. Jesus’ interaction with the woman, though difficult at times, also demonstrates Jesus’ love and the grace which is available to those who are honestly seeking to grow in the knowledge of God.

The inclusive nature of Jesus to defy societal boundaries shows that Jesus does not conform to the ideas of the inferiority of women, but that Jesus seeks to affirm and use all people, regardless of gender, in the mission to spread the gospel. Just as the woman returned to community, inviting others to come and see for themselves, so Jesus invites us, male and female, to enter in and be transformed.

It became important to shine a light on the transformational aspects of the text, because the lack of scholarly attention to and analysis of the impact on self-image and self-worth that resulted from this interaction with Jesus leaves one with an incomplete picture of the importance of this meeting. It seems improbable to this writer that the woman would have been able to receive the gift of salvation offered by Jesus or return to the community which ostracized her without a renewed sense of self-worth and identity. The analysis of this pericope through the lens of self-discovery through relationship with Jesus, affirms the effect positive self-worth and self-image have on a woman's understanding of her ability to assume leadership roles. As a woman's knowledge and understanding of the person and nature of Jesus develops, so does the knowledge of self as a beloved Child of God, empowering women to fully embrace who they are in a positive way.

As the need for female leadership in the church increases, it is important to understand the factors which lead women to respond to requests with "Not Me," a verbalization of an internal perception that they are not qualified or called to leadership. It has often been difficult for women to see themselves outside the societal constraints which have frequently limited their roles in both society and church to that of helpers and support to leadership, rather than as leaders. Even in the twenty-first century, many women still struggle to see themselves in leadership roles both inside and outside of the church.

The author posits that an intentional study and critique of the reasons women are reticent to assume leadership roles will prompt discovery and initiate a change in perception of leadership and personal efficacy. Anticipated objectives of the program

include that participants will learn how variables such as socialization, culture, education, and faith have influenced their understanding of self-worth and the role of women's leadership in the church; they will develop their own definition of leadership; and they will learn to identify and articulate the underlying factors which have influenced their personal reticence to assuming leadership roles in the church. An assumption of this author is that concepts of self-worth and self-efficacy are key to a woman's willingness to move into leadership positions.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

This chapter will focus on a historical discussion of the Black Women's Club Movement. The Black Women's Club Movement's beginning can be traced to the period of the nineteenth century just after the end of the Civil War. The movement grew out of black women's recognition of the devaluation of black womanhood within the majority society as well as within black society. Recognition by black women that their needs were being overlooked and ignored during this time of reconstruction and urbanization served as the impetus for the establishment of these clubs organized and led by women solely dedicated to empowering and educating black women towards self-actualization and self-determination. These clubs evolved during a time when women, and particularly black women, were struggling for recognition and acceptance of their humanity. The clubs served as vehicles for the development of self-worth, self-efficacy, and self-actualization through the promotion of educational, mentoring, and leadership opportunities. This author was drawn to further explore the history of the Black Women's Club Movement after initially researching the lives of Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, Mary Church Terrell, and Jarena Lee as the focal point for this historical foundation. Although their lives provided examples of black women's empowerment relative to the doctoral project, while researching it became clear that the Black Women's Club Movement provided a broader framework to build upon.

The goal of this doctoral project is to develop leadership through personal transformation via small group sessions to assist in the identification and development of positive self-worth and self-efficacy necessary to move persons from avoiding leadership opportunities to a willingness to lead. The Black Women's Club Movement provides historical perspectives on transformational leadership development which emerges through women's engagement in working collectively and collaboratively towards established goals. Many of the clubs mirrored the women's auxiliaries operating in black churches; the United Daughters of Allen was one of the earliest beneficent organizations and grew out of the Free African Society, which would later become the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1786. The growth and proliferation of black women's clubs occurred between 1828 and the early 1900s. Many began as local ladies' clubs formed to address unmet social, educational, and economic needs within the community. The founders of the clubs often came from middle- or upper-class backgrounds and organized to provide social assistance to poorer working-class black women by establishing child-care facilities, kindergartens, orphanages, senior citizen housing, and schools. However, there was also a recognized need to provide opportunities for advancing the intellectual acumen of black women as a means of combating the negative imagery and denigrating stereotypes about black womanhood propagated by the predominant pervasive white culture. The issues of race, class, and gender were always at the forefront of the work of these club women.

The clubs served as informal institutions of learning for black women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when access to formal educational institutions was limited. In her seminal work *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of*

Black Women, Brittney C. Cooper quotes one of the early founders of the Club

Movement, Fannie Barrier Williams, in describing the purpose and function of the clubs:

The clubs themselves are schools in which are taught and learned, more or less thoroughly, the near lessons of life and living. All these clubs have a program for study. In some of the more ambitious clubs, literature, music, and art are studied more or less seriously, but in all of them race problems and sociological questions directly related to the condition of the Negro race in America are the principal subjects for study and discussion.¹

The clubs provided a vehicle by which black women could begin to develop positive self-worth and a sense of self-efficacy through gaining necessary skills and knowledge to engage in activities to promote the welfare of the community at large. They became the place where the voice of black women was not silenced but celebrated, and where the pursuit of justice for all people held primacy. The clubs were more than a place for social gatherings; they were the hub of leadership development where black women gathered to strategize, educate, and organize around issues of race, gender, and class to effect change within the community and the nation.

This chapter will provide a historical overview of the social and economic conditions of black women which led to the emergence of the Black Women's Club Movement. It will also highlight the work of the clubs and the influence of some of the early organizers and leaders of the movement.

The arrival of Africans to America in 1619 began the systematic denigration of the status and value of black women. Paula Giddings writes that as the number of Africans increased within the colonies, there was a need to establish the superiority of whiteness by degrading blacks through the characterization of them as savages devoid of

¹ Brittney C. Cooper, *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 17.

morals and the ability to control sexual impulses.² Where many blacks living in the colonies prior to 1619 were considered free or indentured servants, by 1640, all blacks who came to the colonies were now considered slaves for life. In 1641, Massachusetts became the first colony to establish a statute legalizing slavery; however, at that time it applied to both black and white people. It was not long before the movement to further deny the humanity of blacks, and particularly black women, amended the laws concerning “tithable persons,” defined as those persons who worked in the fields whether slave or free.³ Previously, the law applied only to adult male servants both black and white but was expanded in 1643 to include black women. The laws which previously precluded all women from the harsh field work were amended to exempt only white women. Black women were designated as unfit for domestic work and were relegated to harsh manual labor in the fields. Giddings writes that the circle of denigration of black women was made complete once the law stipulated that sexual relations with black women or men was considered unchristian, and the children born to black mothers would, regardless of paternity, inherit the mother’s status, which was becoming synonymous with that of a slave.⁴ Also, during this time, black women found themselves unprotected from the exploitation and sexual advances of white men.

Laws protecting women from sexual abuse did not apply to black women who were characterized as hypersexual and seductive animals who were the initiators of sexual interactions with white males. As legal protections for blacks were systematically

² Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York, NY: Amistad, 1984), 35.

³ Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 36.

⁴ Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 37.

stripped away in favor of a system of chattel slavery, the recognition of the economic value of black women as ‘breeders’ became the foundation of the economy. Gloria J. Browne-Marshall states, “The colonists changed the law to increase the wealth and domination of the White master who had eliminated certain costs of purchasing human labor by becoming a breeder of slaves. The Black female, woman or child, was forced into sexual relationships for the White slave master’s pleasure and profit.”⁵ These structural and systemic structures of oppression served to further erode and denigrate the self-worth and self-perception of black women who were constantly subjected to images and language which dehumanized them. The intentional denial of the humanity of black women created a chasm in which the development of a positive self-worth was undermined by the characterization of black women as animalistic, with limited intelligence and devoid of the ability of self-determination. The denial of rights and protections under the law for black women created an environment of mental, physical, and emotional abuse and cruelty which became normalized in this society as a means of satisfying both economic needs and the need to protect the concept of “cult of true womanhood.”

The “cult of womanhood, the cult of domesticity,” was an idealized view of white womanhood which evolved after the Revolutionary War as part of the southern strategy to suppress potential slave resistance and promote the ideal of the domesticity of the plantation.⁶ Slave owners began to replace the practices of brutal physical abuse with

⁵ Gloria J. Browne-Marshall, “Failing Our Black Children: Statutory Rape Laws, Moral Reform and the Hypocrisy of Denial,” 2002, accessed April 10, 2019, <http://academic.udayton.edu/race/05intersection/Gender/rape.htm>.

⁶ Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 47.

trying to create a more tranquil environment where loyalty was rewarded with protection and physical necessities. The 'ideal or true woman' was the white wife and mother who did not work outside the home, was submissive to her husband, and maintained a high degree of purity and piety. They were often portrayed as helpless and delicate, and therefore, were not to be the objects of their husbands' sexual desires.

However, black women were viewed as subhuman with questionable moral character. They were denied the right to have dominion over their bodies and often were used as sexual substitutes for the white slave owners' wives. As slave owners sought to shift the narrative away from the brutality of slavery, they developed a new southern strategy to promote the narrative of 'happy slaves.' They promoted the idea of the domestication of the plantation as representative of a family unit. They attempted to portray slavery as a relational institution in which slaves, though property, were also considered to be the extended family members of the slave owner.⁷ Slave families were permitted to remain together as a deterrent to rebellion and flight. Concessions were made to improve the physical living conditions of the slaves in return for unquestioned obedience and loyalty to the slave owner, who still employed capital punishment when there was any indication of a rebellious behavior.

This new 'happy family' narrative, however, did not provide protections for black women, despite the attempt to portray slave owners as beneficent in the treatment of their slaves. Black women were still required to satisfy the sexual desires of their masters without complaint. White women seeking to adhere to this image of purity and piety were tolerant of their husbands' intimate relationships with slave women. Despite the

⁷ Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 42.

lack of protections under the law, black women found ways to resist slavery as well as the misrepresentation of their personhood as subhuman and having a lesser intelligence than their white counterpoints.

Giddings explains this in *When and Where I Enter*:

The White wife was hoisted on a pedestal so high she was beyond the sensual reach of her own husband. Black women were consigned to the other end of the scale, as mistresses, whores or breeders. Thus, in the nineteenth century, Black women's resistance to slavery took on an added dimension. With the diminution of overt rebellion, their resistance became more covert or internalized. The focus of the struggle was no longer against the notion that they were less than human but that they were different kinds of humans.⁸

Giddings writes that black women's resistance to accepting the label of being a 'different kind of human' while refuting their status as the property of the master was an act of feminist resistance.⁹ This struggle to claim their full humanity was not unique to slaves in the South, as black women in the North faced their own challenges to the acknowledgment of their full personhood. Although they were free women, the negative characterization of the immorality of black women remained as an obstacle to overcome. Throughout slavery, slave owners promoted the seemingly immutable idea that persons of African descent were, by nature, devoid of morality. This characterization of black women as naturally immoral allowed for the promulgation of the stigma to be applied to the free women of the North, who were also considered outside the realm of "womanhood" and its prerogatives because they worked outside the home or belonged to a group who had a history of sexual exploitation.¹⁰

⁸ Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 42-43.

⁹ Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 43.

¹⁰ Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 49.

It was during this time, amid the onset of industrialization, when women were being added to the workforce that the concept of ‘true womanhood’ evolved into what was known as the ‘cult of true womanhood’ or the ‘cult of domesticity.’ As southern white men migrated north to find employment, the realization that many of the jobs were held by white women created the perfect environment to further advance the idea of ‘true womanhood.’ Femininity was equated with the qualities of domesticity, submissiveness, piety, and purity, which were held up as ideals to be emulated and attained. Working outside the home or displaying qualities of industriousness and drive were considered unfeminine, while the role of wife and mother was the ultimate goal of ‘true womanhood.’ The unrealistic expectations associated with ‘true womanhood’ excluded black women who were primarily forced to work outside the home. Black women were not afforded the luxury of a leisure lifestyle. In her article “A Clarion Call to Awake! Arise! Act!” in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, Marcia Y. Riggs writes:

On the one hand, upper-class white women of leisure were best able to maintain some semblance of this ideal of womanhood, and white middle-class women sought to align their behavior with the ‘cult’ as a vehicle for social mobility. On the other hand, working-class and all Black women were considered transgressors of the “cult”. Also, working-class and all Black women were considered to be freely available for sexual use by upper-class white men. Moreover, Black women were bound together and oppressed as a distinct sociohistorical group by this ideology of the ‘cult of true womanhood,’ on the one hand, and the racial ideology of the Black child-savage on the other hand. The social myth of the ‘bad black woman’ resulted from an intertwining of these gender and racial ideologies and all Black women (poor, working class and professional) found that their nature and role was defined by society largely in terms of that myth.¹¹

¹¹ Marcia Y. Riggs, “A Clarion Call to Awake! Arise! Act!: The Response of the Black Women’s Club Movement to Institutionalized Moral Evil,” in *A Troubling in My Soul*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 68.

Large numbers of black women had migrated from the South, many of them single mothers who needed to find employment to provide for their families. Although middle-class white women were now exiting the job force to assume the role of housewife, black women were excluded from the opportunity to fill these vacant positions. The jobs, clerical and industrial, which had provided many servant-class white women the opportunity to move from lower- to middle-class were denied to women of color. Many found that the only work available to them was domestic work in white households or other low paying jobs such as washwomen or seamstresses, without the prospect of advancement. The characterization of black females as hypersexual also created an opportunity for the exploitation of young women in the South who were often lured north by the promise of domestic employment. Upon their arrival, they were forced to work in brothels under a form of indentured servitude in which the girls were contractually obligated to repay the cost of their transportation and housing.¹² The intelligence of black women was continually under attack from portrayals of them as ignorant and having a mental capacity comparable only to that of a child. Even educated and articulate black women were subjected to these same stereotypes, regardless of their ability.

The social and economic conditions which necessitated that black women work outside the home also provided the justification for further societal devaluation of black womanhood. Where previously poor servant-class white women had been afforded opportunities to advance their social and economic status through viable employment, black women remained vulnerable to economic hardship, sexual exploitation, and societal alienation. The constraints of race, gender, and class all converged to ensure the

¹² Riggs, "A Clarion Call to Awake!" 69.

continued marginalization and stereotyping of black women as something less than human, devoid of the characteristics associated with the socially accepted tenets of 'true womanhood.' Black women found themselves resisting the societal stigmas and injustices being perpetuated on them because of their race and gender. Marcia Y. Riggs states:

Black women found that their gender leveled out their experiences across class lines, and consequently, a race-gender-class consciousness emerged among Black women, which reflected this fact. It is the negative interaction of gender with race and class within the lives of Black women (regardless of whether they were poor, working class or professional) that shaped Black women's public responses to injustice--to institutionalized moral evil—in society. The Black women's club movement was one of those public responses.¹³

The organization and rise of black women's literary, temperance, and improvement societies in the nineteenth century provided space for black women's voices to be heard and strengthened. The groups were formed to promote literacy and intellectual advancement and provide financial support and instructions on morality among black women to counter negative stereotypes. Black women recognized that, despite adherence to societal standards of ethics, morality, and respectability, they still were not afforded the dignity or acknowledgement of their full womanhood.¹⁴ The Black Women's Club Movement became a vehicle of resistance against the racist narrative of 'the cult of true womanhood' and the concept of white dominance, and empowerment and advocacy for the dismantling of stigmas and negative stereotypes associated with black society and particularly, black women. The club movement developed alongside other community organizations which were also evolving as part of a social reform movement such as

¹³ Riggs, "A Clarion Call to Awake!" 70.

¹⁴ Riggs, "A Clarion Call to Awake!" 69.

black churches, independent schools for black children, and various businesses. Marcia Y. Riggs writes, “The black women’s club movement can also be interpreted as a significant social reform movement under the leadership and membership of women who were sustained by a particular religious-ethical worldview that was derived from the church.”¹⁵ Some of the groups, like prayer circles, Dorcas societies, and groups focused on community enrichment, were born out of the church while others were organized as small groups in homes. The political arm of many black churches was associated with the women’s clubs. Through their work in the church, women learned the leadership skills necessary to plan, organize, and execute programs to benefit the church and community. These small groups provided avenues for personal, spiritual, and professional development in opposition and resistance to the attempt to confine them to subservient roles of domesticity in the homes of others.

Giddings states that although the names of the organizations may have implied a focus only on social activities, they were so much more. Cooper writes, “Black women did not have the luxury of confining their advocacy for shaping of Black moral, social or intellectual life strictly to the domestic realm.”¹⁶ This was in part because within black society, the concepts of public and private are not as clearly defined as in white society because, for blacks, private lives are inherently intertwined with the public laws and policies under which they exist. During this time, there was also a developing white woman club movement focused on issues germane to the white middle-upper-class with

¹⁵ Marcia Y. Riggs, “African American Children, ‘The Hope of the Race’: Mary Church Terrell, the Social Gospel, and the Work of the Black Women’s Club Movement,” in *The Child in Christian Thought* 366 (2001), accessed March 1, 2019, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

¹⁶ Cooper, *Beyond Respectability*, 13.

little concern for the advancement of black women. The recognition that these clubs did not place a priority on advancing the status or condition of black women became the impetus for organizing black women's clubs to fight the disparity and injustices associated with the systemic issues of poverty, racism, and oppression which plagued the black community. The formation of the black women clubs was an act of resistance and self-determination, as black women recognized that the best persons to advocate for and advance their causes were themselves. Black women understood that they must have an intentional focus on raising the intellectual acumen and leadership abilities of black women if they were to dispel the negative narratives surrounding race, gender, and class.¹⁷ The goal and intent of the clubs was to give voice and respect to black women's voices and to create infrastructure through advocacy and education to positively impact individuals and the community.

Riggs shares a quote from Addie W. Hunton, a national organizer of the Black Women's Club Movement, which highlights the intent and urgency of the work of the black women clubs:

The colored women's club is an eleemosynary organization. There may be a social feature and some attention may be given to self-culture, but these are secondary. The main purposes are to relieve suffering, to reclaim the erring, and to advance the cause of education. Neither have colored club women seen fit to ape (*mimic*) their fairer sisters' work to any perceptible degree. The conditions are essentially different and our women have recognized this fact. For want of means and time, it is difficult for any one of our clubs to foster a large number of enterprises. It has been the aim of each club, however, to find the thing most needed in its special community and to devote a volume of loving service to overcoming that need. The motto for work has grown to be 'Quality rather than quantity.'¹⁸

¹⁷ Cooper, *Beyond Respectability*, 16.

¹⁸ Riggs, "A Clarion Call to Awake!" 71.

These organizations identified concerns in their communities: the Ohio Literary Ladies Society, for example, established schools for black children; others provided financial assistance to needy families, supported the establishment of black newspapers, and provided self-improvement education for poor black women. Others took more public stands, hosting forums to raise awareness of conditions impacting the black community such as racism and lynching. Ida B. Wells, activist and newswoman, was a staunch opponent of lynching and traveled the nation lecturing on the horrors of lynching and advocating for anti-lynching legislation. It was through her efforts that Memphis passed an anti-lynching bill. The African American Female Intelligence Society of Boston sponsored one of the first open political forums in 1832 in which a young abolitionist and free black woman, Maria Stewart, spoke about racism and civil and women's rights, despite the opposition and disapproval of members within the liberal community. She espoused ideas of empowerment and liberation, and in the words of Giddings, "suffused Black women with a tenacious feminism even before Sarah Grimke, who is credited with being the progenitor of thought around American women's political activism."¹⁹

Despite efforts to keep black women in their places of subordination and subservience, the number of organizations grew exponentially between 1828-1846, and by 1900, there were approximately three hundred women's clubs throughout the United States. Mary Garrett founded the Black New Orleans Women in 1878 with a membership of 500 to support migration from the South to the North, particularly for women to protect them from sexual exploitation. Groups like the Mother Society of New

¹⁹ Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 52.

York and the Kansas Relief Association provided benevolent assistance to poor women and those recently migrated from the South.

Black women were finding and using their voices to usher in a new era and raise a new generation of women. Giddings writes that Afro-American women were frustrated with the lack of support from black male leaders to defend the race and that it was Fannie Barrier Williams, educator and women's activist, who affirmed the power of women organizing to effect change after a speech given by Ida B. Wells in 1892. Following the speech of Wells, Williams called together several women who organized the black women's clubs in New York City, Brooklyn, and Boston, which ignited the growth of clubs throughout the country. One of the central guiding tenets of these societies was the uplift of the race and the education of children. Many societies placed a programmatic emphasis on meeting the needs of children and women, establishing kindergartens, industrial schools, and adult education classes for women.

Although these local societies were having a positive impact within black society, there was an understanding that a greater impact could be made through collective and collaborative efforts. In 1895, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, organizer of the Women's Era Club of Boston and founder of the Woman's Era newspaper, called for the convening of the first national conference known as the National Conference for Colored Women, which brought 100 women from ten states together to form a national organization.²⁰ Around the same time, Mary Margaret Washington, the wife of Booker T. Washington, convened a meeting to unite thirty-six clubs from twelve states under the name the National Federation of Afro-American Women, where she was elected president.

²⁰ Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 93.

Similarly, the National League of Colored Women led by Mary Church Terrell was working to unite societies. One year later, in 1896, the National Conference, the Federation, and the National League united to form the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) with Mary Church Terrell as president.²¹ Speakers such as Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin declared their understanding that there was a pressing urgency to address issues germane to black women which were being ignored by the white women's clubs. They saw an urgent need to form a national organization which would hold the needs of black women and the black community as primary and not secondary to their mission. This sentiment was expressed in St. Pierre Ruffin's words to the convention: "Our women's movement is a woman's movement in that it is led and directed by women. We are not alienating or withdrawing. We are only coming to the front."²² This indicated that the establishment of a national organization meant that black women would no longer take a back seat or minority role in white women's organizations but would become the premier organization working to improve the lives of the black community.

The establishment of this national organization ushered in an era of self-awareness, self-actualization, importance, and influence for black women in which women echoed the sentiments found in the words of Anna Julia Cooper: "Only the Black Woman can say 'when and where I enter in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole race enters with me.'"²³ Women were stepping outside the confines of the

²¹ Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 93.

²² Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 86.

²³ Cooper, *Beyond Respectability*, 5.

preestablished expectations associated with the ‘cult of white womanhood’ to claim their inherent power and God-given abilities. Women were being empowered to extricate themselves from the negative imagery and stereotypes which had plagued them through the racist tropes of immorality, illiteracy, and promiscuity. It was an era in which women were seeking acknowledgment of their inherent worth and dignity; Anna Cooper said that the goal of this movement for empowerment was not the attainment of racial respectability, but the acknowledgment of the undisputed dignity of black people.²⁴ For Cooper, dignity was not a social construct like respect; rather, it was the fundamental recognition of one’s inherent humanity and the ultimate goal of liberation, as self-worth is the result of claiming one’s humanity.

Through education, these clubs sought to move poor black women and the community to a place of self-actualization, self-determination, and self-knowledge through communal engagement. Initially, the founders and members of the black women’s clubs, and eventually the NACW, were middle- to upper-class educated black women. This at times created tension, as the good intent behind their social improvement endeavors perpetuated the class prejudice already present within the race. Some of the attitudes and approaches taken by the clubs could be construed as patronizing and having a missionary attitude in the way that they dealt with the poor.²⁵ However, despite the internal class tension, the club women understood the interconnectedness of race, gender, and class in society. This should not, however, diminish the positive impact on black women and society which resulted from the presence and actions of the organizations.

²⁴ Cooper, *Beyond Respectability*, 5.

²⁵ Gerda Lerner, “Early Community Work of the Black Club Women,” *The Journal of Negro History* 59, no. 2 (1974): 158-67, accessed February 28, 2019, doi:10.2307/2717327.

The leaders of the club movement recognized that regardless of their educational, economic, or professional achievements, in the eyes of the greater society, all black women were judged by the same criteria. They had a tacit understanding that they were not exempt from the ravages of prejudice, racism, or social or political injustices which plagued their brothers and sisters of a lower socioeconomic status. This understanding of their mutual connectedness was the inspiration for the motto of the NACW, “Lifting as We Climb.” This motto and ideology contrasted that of W. E. B. DuBois’ talented tenth top-down leadership model. Terrell, the organization’s first president, said:

Self-preservation demands that [Black women] go among the lowly, illiterate, and even the vicious, to whom they are bound by ties of race and sex....to reclaim them....members have determined to come into the closest possible touch with the masses of our women, through whom the womanhood of our people is always judged.²⁶

Terrell understood the need for a more inclusive model of leadership in which those most impacted were trained to assume leadership to champion the causes affecting their communities. The NACW believed that educating and uplifting those considered to be the least was critical to developing effective programs because it was the persons closest to the issues who had the greatest ability to identify problems, develop strategies, and implement plans to affect sustainable change.

As women engaged in the programs of the clubs, there was a noticeable change in self-perception through the development of a new, positive sense of racial self-esteem. This newly formed self-esteem was borne from the idea that your identity was not tied to the misconceptions of your humanity and worth based on a false narrative of inferiority. Cooper writes, “To feel that you are something better than a slave or a descendent of an

²⁶ Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 98.

ex-slave, to feel that you are a unit in the womanhood of a great nation and a great civilization is the beginning of self-respect and the respect of your race.”²⁷ This newly developed self-esteem worked to counteract years of invisibility and feelings of shame and inferiority inflicted upon them by society. Lerner describes the impact of the work of Ida B. Wells to expose racial oppression, the horrors of lynching, and the habitual sexual abuse of black women by white men. Lerner posits that through her work, Wells “expressed what was to become the ideological direction of the organized movement of black women—a defense of black womanhood as part of the defense of the race from terror and abuse.”²⁸

The black women’s clubs challenged the negative stereotypes which sought to force black women into a conciliatory position by assimilating to the unrealistic standards which were associated with the ‘cult of womanhood’ as the determinant of their femininity and humanity. The clubs created avenues by which women could grow in their knowledge and understanding of self-worth, while learning skills necessary to be self-sustaining. Anna Julia Cooper emphasized that black women should not look to others for affirmation, but each woman should have a healthy sense of self-worth and not feel compelled to assume traditional female roles as the only validation of their worth. The clubs provided a vehicle by which women who had lived under the stigma of shame, guilt, illiteracy, and diminished identity could move to greater self-awareness. Women were being trained to be leaders in their communities and redefine for themselves ‘when and where’ they entered and what it meant to be a black woman in America.

²⁷ Cooper, *Beyond Respectability*, 34.

²⁸ Lerner, “Early Community Work of the Black Club Women,” 160.

In researching and analyzing the Black Women's Club Movement, it was evident that self-worth and self-awareness were integral to the program's focus on leadership development. The development and proliferation of these clubs, which focused on self-help, education, and empowerment during a time in history when black women were both denigrated and invisible to the larger society, demonstrates what can happen through personal transformation of self-image. Despite societal advances in women's issues, for many black women the issues of self-worth and self-image remain a place of struggle. The residue of centuries of negative stereotyping and marginalization still influence the way many black women view themselves today. Although there is no longer an explicit emphasis or focus on the standards of domesticity, purity, and piety of 'true womanhood,' the messages still remain covertly shared as a standard to be achieved.

As black women continue to struggle for full acceptance under the weight of societal standards of beauty, acceptability, and worth, the Black Women's Club Movement provides a valuable tool for structuring programs which address the empowerment and development of leaders. The historical messages which sought to deny the humanity and worth of black women are more somber today; but just as prevalently, we are told through social media, print, and media images that white womanhood is still the ultimate measure of femininity. We are still confronted with the negative stereotypes from centuries before as black women continue to face the struggle associated with the intersection of race, gender, and class. Assertive black women are frequently portrayed as angry and irrational, who, like their ancestors, are not fit for leadership. Additionally, there is still the stigmatization of black women as hypersexual, immoral, and often lazy, seeking to live off others. Black women, even today, despite the

strides in women's rights, continue to constantly push against the narrative that daily diminishes their sense of self as they are told they are not pretty enough, smart enough, strong enough, or qualified enough to assume leadership positions available to other segments of society. Black women continue to be subjected to messages which deny their femininity and womanhood, as reflective in comments regarding black female athletes who are still often referred to in animalistic terms.

Additionally, studies of biases in the educational system have shown that black girls are often ignored in the classroom and presumed to be of less intelligence than their white classmates. The historical issues of oppression and denial of humanity have greatly impacted black women's abilities to embrace and internalize a positive self-worth, self-image, and self-efficacy. Understanding the historical underpinnings associated with this diminished view of self among black women and the persistent negative imagery highlights how the structure of the black women's clubs can be a useful insight into ways to address the issues of worth today. Through the success of the clubs, there is support for this researcher's thesis that as women develop a positive sense of worth and ability, they will be less reticent to pursue leadership roles. When one's worth and value are affirmed, there is less hesitancy to assume leadership as evidenced in the proliferation of the black women's clubs whose leadership understood that their role was to raise leaders from within the organization. They did this by addressing issues of worth and providing training for valuable skills necessary to be successful.

Although the clubs eventually consolidated to become a national organization, the primary work was still done through smaller, regionally led groups. This speaks to the power of small-group interaction in the development of self-worth and self-esteem. The

design of this project will be based on the small-group model where attention can be paid to individual members and affirmation can come from those engaged in the learning. The small-group model extends the concept of our interconnectedness and the importance of community in the development of a positive self-worth through the establishment of mutually respectable relationships. It was within these safe and nurturing environments where each were treated with dignity and respect that women were able to develop a new self-identity. Although not specifically discussed in this chapter, the role of mentors or guides played a significant role in the club women's model, as they identified the unique qualities and abilities of the women and provided opportunities to learn and practice leadership. Additionally, the emphasis on self-help and literacy suggests that the use of guided reflection and journaling can assist individuals in the identification of strengths and weaknesses as they move to self-awareness and actualization.

Finally, though not emphasized in this chapter, the work of the club women was founded on their faith and belief in the justice of God. Many of the clubs began within the historical Black Church, where morality and faith were central to the teachings and instructions. The women shared a worldview in God which insisted that blacks were included in the plan of salvation, and which saw justice for blacks as a commandment from God and their work as fulfilling the Gospel. The primacy of scripture in helping women to locate their sense of self in God is essential to the development of a positive sense of self-worth and self-efficacy. Within the project, the emphasis on God's grace as seen in scripture will be the foundation of each lesson. The biblical foundation text of John chapter four shows the transformation which occurs when one envisions one's self as worthy of God's love and the empowerment that occurs through that revelation. The

women of Ward Chapel will explore biblical text and the historical roots of the marginalization of black women, building on the positive aspects of the Black Women's Club Movement as a model of empowerment towards leadership.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

As presented in the previous chapters within the disciplines of biblical interpretation and history the impact and stories of women and particularly black women have been misrepresented or ignored while their contributions have often gone unnoticed or minimized as menial and subordinate to others. Issues and concerns of black women throughout history have all too often been overlooked and seen as having little to no value within the larger society. This has also been true within the context of theological studies where until relatively recently little attention or thought was given to the study of black women's religious ideations, faith formation or understanding of God.

As classical religious perspectives which located the study and interpretation of God within an androcentric context were being challenged through the development of new more inclusive avenues of theological discourse, such as feminism and black liberation theology, there were still voices which were not being heard. Black women who sought to embrace these new theological frameworks realized that neither fully addressed the complexities of being black, female and often poor in America and the consequences of living in this intersectionality of race, class and gender. It is posited by this author that study of womanist theology is foundational to understanding the potential for empowerment and transformation of women's perceptions of self-worth through faith formation, engagement with biblical text and analysis of the ecclesiastical structures

which previously informed their understanding of God. Womanist theology can be considered a fluid and constantly evolving theology because womanist thought is informed by the lived experiences of black women.

This chapter will engage a discussion of the evolution of womanist theology, themes of womanist thought, overview of feminism and black liberation theology as precursors to womanist theology, and its relevance today. Within the discussion of the evolution of womanist theology several of the progenitors of womanist theology and current womanist theologians will be highlighted.

The emphasis of womanist theology on the importance of life experience, community and scripture informs the development of the anticipated project by providing a model to assist women in engaging the sacred text through their own experiential lens. Study and discussion of familiar text through a womanist perspective will afford an opportunity for the women of Ward Chapel to explore the biblical text free from the oppressive patriarchal influences of shame and guilt. In her seminal work *Sisters in the Wilderness*, Delores S. Williams states “Womanist hermeneutics must take seriously the assumption that the Bible is a male story populated by human males, divine males, divine male emissaries and human women mostly servicing male goals, whether social, political, cultural or religious.”¹ Providing the women of Ward the opportunity to read and examine the text from a womanist perspective in a mutually respectable and affirming environment will allow them to begin to deconstruct embedded negative concepts of the role of women in both scripture and society. This deconstruction allows for the creation

¹ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), 187.

of new faith language and a redefining of self in relationship to the Divine within the context of their personal experience.

One of the primary suppositions of womanist theology is the power in the telling of ‘our stories’ as an avenue to reclaim a personal and collective narrative through self-awareness of one’s value and worth. Stephanie Y. Mitchem posits womanist theology’s emphasis on the importance of women telling their own stories provides the entry point for black women to fully engage in theological processes and dialogues in their own voices and not the voices of others.² We see this line of thought expressed in the Ghanaian proverb which states “until the lion/lioness has his or her own storyteller, the hunter will always have the best part of the story” or in a different version “until the lion/lioness learns how to write every story will glorify the hunter.”³ This proverb illuminates the implicit bias which is present when only one viewpoint is considered as authoritative to speak on and express someone else’s truth. The lived experiences of black women in America are significantly different from that of white women or even black men necessitating the expansion of theological inquisition beyond the constraints of race and gender to include classism and sexism in the discussion.

The investigation of Womanist theology will inform the approach to build a project which will provide an environment in which the women of Ward Chapel can develop mutually respectful relationships in sacred, safe and communal space. The result of these trust relationships will encourage the women to share personal stories through

² Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), ix.

³ Simeon Messan Adagba, “Contemporary Use and Religious Application,” Afriprov, accessed May 27, 2019, <https://www.afriprov.org/african-proverb-of-the-month/32-2006proverbs/224-april-2006>.

which they can begin to give voice to their beliefs and fears around the issue of female leadership. The use of scripture as the foundation for each session will encourage women to explore the text using their lived experiences as their interpretive lens to assist with demystifying the representation of women while reconciling societal expectations with what they believe God is saying through the text.

Theology simply defined is a word or rational thought about God.⁴ The study of theology is the attempt to understand and define the Christian faith in a manner that is relevant to the contemporary world. It seeks to provide an understanding of the nature of God, God's interaction with humanity and God's intervention on behalf of humanity. Theology attempts to take an ancient message and contextualize it so that the validity and sustainability of the message can be seen within the events of the contemporary world. It is the means by which God reveals God's self to humanity through constant inquisition and searching for truth within the scriptures and life experiences. For this author, one engages theology to search for truth through reflection on Christian doctrine and personal experiences of God in order to determine what one believes and why.

Stacey M. Floyd Thomas writes about this search for truth and the evolution of womanist theology:

Womanist theology was formed not only in a context in which white men controlled the public spheres of academia and the church but also within a generally embraced standpoint where, to use Gloria Hull's words, "all the women are white, all the Blacks are men." The same efforts within Black theology and feminist theology that were forging a discourse to deconstruct the normative gaze of white male dominance resulted in obscuring and obliterating the exigent

⁴ William Hodrern, *A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology* (New York, NY: Collier Books, 2002), xiv.

realities and liberative aspirations of Black women within the church, academy society as well.⁵

It was the exclusion of the concerns of black women which was the impetus for black female theologians, and ethicists to begin to question the efficacy of a liberation theology which excluded the study of the oppressive forces under which black women lived. Even in the black church, the place of liberation, the voices of black women were not held in high regard as many churches did not validate the call of women to ordained ministry or leadership roles within the church. One such example is that of Jarena Lee who professed a call to preach in the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1809 and was denied a license to preach by Bishop Richard Allen, who believed women could lead prayer meetings but not preach.⁶

Black liberation theology continued the theology of male hierarchy and superiority over women through its denial of women's right to full participation in the church and its relegation of women to supporting roles to male leadership in the church. The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) which was born as a protest to religious oppression and the struggle for human dignity provides an example of how the fight for black liberation was not inclusive of black female voices. Brenda J. Hayes states "men in leadership in the AME church have been all too willing to accept the aid and support of women but not so willing to accept them as pastors, bishops or even heads of boards or departments of the church. Women have been allowed to give leadership when men were

⁵ Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, "Womanist Theology," in *Liberation Theologies in the United States: An Introduction*, ed. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas and Anthony B. Pinn (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2010), 38.

⁶ Vashti McKenzie, *Not Without a Struggle* (Cleveland, OH: Fortress Press, 1996), 32.

not available, but they were not given the same titles or compensation.”⁷ Women were often denied the ability to hold leadership positions in male dominated organizations within the church and often women’s auxiliaries, such as the Board of Stewardess, were established in order to maintain hierarchal structures of sexism. Vashti McKenzie states in her book *Not Without a Struggle*,

The church has not reneged on the challenge to continue its historical leadership in the struggle against oppression of the African American community. The church has stood against racism; it has not stood against the oppression of African American women as enemies of, rather than partners in, community, and kingdom building. Ministers have used the bible to justify subordinate roles of women within the institution.⁸

Monica Coleman states “Womanist theology is a response to sexism in black theology and racism in feminist theology.”⁹ Although womanist theology did not emerge to the forefront until the 1980’s some scholars like Jacquelyn Grant, Delores Williams suggest that black women have always engaged in the work of liberation theology through their wisdom and lived experiences. Women who were not afforded formal leadership in the church often held small group meetings in their homes to study the bible and share life lessons. As referenced in the historical chapter it was in the context of these meetings that the black club women’s movement grew as women explored what it meant to be black and female within the church and society. As black religious scholars began to engage the work of investigating theology from their context, they embraced the term

⁷ Brenda J. Hayes, *Eye Has Not Seen* (St. Louis, MO: Clarion Publishing, 1999), 14.

⁸ McKenzie, *Not Without A Struggle*, 52-53.

⁹ Monica Y. Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 6.

‘womanist’ from the prologue of Alice Walker’s *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens*.

Coleman summarizes the definition:

1. From *womanish*. (Opp. of “girlish,” i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, “you acting womanish,” i.e., like a woman. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Serious.
2. *Also*: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally a universal. Traditionally capable.
3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*.
4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.¹⁰

The word “womanist” with its multilayered definition provided the foundation upon which black female theologians and ethicists built the themes and thoughts which express the culture inherent in black women. Coleman further suggests that Walker’s embrace of the word ‘womanist’ was important because of the power associated with ‘naming’ because ‘what’ we call ourselves and ‘how’ we choose to be identified matters. This power of ‘naming’ is also emphasized by Stacey Floyd-Thomas, womanist theological ethicist, who connects womanism with Sojourner Truth when she posits that a century after Sojourner Truth changed her name from Isabella Baumfree, black female scholars of religion claimed a similar naming power and called themselves ‘womanist’.¹¹

Historically enslaved Africans in America were not allowed to retain their language or

¹⁰ Monica Y. Coleman, “Introduction: Ain’t I a Womanist Too?” in *Ain’t I a Woman Too? Third-Wave Womanist Religious Thought*, ed. Monica Y. Coleman (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 3.

¹¹ Floyd-Thomas, *Liberation Theologies in the United States*, 44.

names as a means of furthering the oppression and dehumanization under which they lived. The ability to 'name' suggests a level of power associated with development of a self-identity and movement towards self-determination as women claim for themselves an identity apart from what has been imposed by society. In this project's context the concept of naming becomes an integral part of the movement towards developing a positive sense of self-worth and self-efficacy. Womanist theology affords women the opportunity to begin to explore the questions of 'who am I' and 'who do I want to be' outside of the stigmas and stereotypes others have placed on them while empowering them to move towards self-naming and self-identification. It opens the biblical text for exploration of the stories of the marginalized from the vantage point of today's marginalized. McKenzie quotes womanist theologian Renita Weems as saying:

African American women are challenged to identify with available biblical resources written by and for those in power against the powerless. Marginalized readers, such as African American women, must do all they can to recover the voice of the oppressed from the biblical text, which necessitates relying upon their own experience of oppression as a resource.¹²

Although the term 'womanist' was embraced as the name of this new theology, Coleman points out that among womanist scholars the definition itself is only a starting point for womanist thought which has evolved over time and from which the movement of womanism grew.¹³ Womanist theologians do not assume that they speak for all black women rather they understand the importance of engaging the voices of women from the various social, economic and educational strata of society. Womanist theology seeks to encourage the accumulation of knowledge from a variety of sources to allow women to

¹² McKenzie, *Not Without A Struggle*, 51.

¹³ Coleman, "Introduction," 4.

begin to formulate their own spirituality through a self-defined God-talk informed by their context but not dictated by it. It allows for the exploration of self through the exploration of scripture, and other sources to assist in identity formation through engagement with the community.

In *Liberation Theologies in the United States*, Floyd-Thomas asserts that as a woman develops a new knowledge of herself and her reality she is empowered to make an informed choice in how she is going to improve her life, the lives of loved ones and how they are studied. She posits “that unlike feminism, womanism is not the overarching paradigm to which all women must ascribe rather it is a guide to self-definition and self-determination which is not imposed on a woman rather it is embraced by those who are engaged in the eradication of oppression from her faith perspective and academic discipline.”¹⁴ This understanding of the importance of self-determination within womanist theology provides foundational support to the project at Ward Chapel as participants will begin to explore the role of religion and the church in the construction of self-identity and determination of self-worth.

Womanist theology differs from both feminist and black male theology by taking a holistic approach to theology focusing on the liberation, survival and transformation of all people, regardless of race, gender or socioeconomic status, not just the liberation of an identified group. Delores Williams in her seminal work on womanist theology, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, writes

“Womanist theology especially concerns itself with the faith, survival and freedom-struggle of African American women.” Thus, womanist theology identifies and critiques black male oppression of black females while it also critiques white racism that oppresses all African Americans, female and male. Like white feminist theology, womanist theology affirms the full humanity of

¹⁴ Floyd-Thomas, *Liberation Theologies in the United States*, 45.

women. But womanist theology also critiques white feminist participation in the perpetuation of white supremacy, which continues to dehumanize black women. Yet womanist theology is organically related to black male liberation theology and feminist theology in its various expressions.... Nonetheless, womanist theology is usually non-separatist and dialogical. It welcomes discourse with a variety of theological voices – liberation, white feminist, Mujerista, Jewish, Asian, African, classical and contemporary “male-stream,” as well as non-feminist, non-womanist female voices. Womanist theology considers one of its primary tasks to dialogue with the church and other disciplines.¹⁵

Womanist theology does not view itself as being diametrically opposed to either black male liberation theology or feminist theology but rather as an inclusive expanded dialogue with all voices seeking liberation. Although feminist theology amplified the voices of some women it did so to the exclusion of the voices of minority women. Stacey Floyd-Thomas posits that black women although active in both the feminist and black liberation movements still found themselves underrepresented in the struggles as issues of feminist critique of patriarchy and sexism; and black male liberation critique of white supremacy and race; did not give voice to or address the tri-dimensional oppression of race, class and gender experienced by black women. Feminist and black male liberation theology were nuanced towards liberation of individual distinct groups of people where womanism focused on communal wholeness. Floyd-Thomas further asserts that feminism was a “critique of patriarchy as it related to the concerns of predominately white middle- and upper-class women with little concern for the needs of women of color in general and Black women in particular.”¹⁶ The exclusion of minority voices by feminists was reminiscent of the disenfranchisement of black women by the leaders of the suffrage movement during the 1890’s. The fight for women’s right to vote

¹⁵ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, xiv-xv.

¹⁶ Floyd-Thomas, *Liberation Theologies in the United States*, 39.

was not inclusive of black women needs or concerns just as the rise of feminism did not place issues of race or class at the center of its movement.

It was this focus on the concerns of white middle and upper-class white women to the exclusion of the concerns of black and minority women which first led to black feminist questioning the commitment of the movement to champion for all women. Floyd-Thomas emphasizes the distinction between white feminist theology and womanist theology by saying “feminists largely deal with the political and ideological, while Black women are in need of a discourse and movement that also embraces the spiritual and personal because these are the means to meet their common objective – elevation and empowerment of women.”¹⁷

Womanist theology evolved as a mechanism to elevate the needs and experiences of both black women and the community into the conversation to bring about communal healing and restoration by giving voice to those who have been overlooked and marginalized. Linda E. Thomas posits that “race and gender concerns of feminist and black theology are essential for theological conversation while a holistic womanist God-talk and God-walk, are necessary in order to address the survival and liberation issues of women, men, children, workers, gays and lesbians, as they relate to local and global economies and the environment.”¹⁸ Delores Williams furthers this thought on the engagement of womanist and black liberation theology “the work of theology is and always has been to encourage black people and the African American denominational

¹⁷ Floyd-Thomas, *Liberation Theologies in the United States*, 39.

¹⁸ Linda E. Thomas, “Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm,” in *Living Stones in the Household of God*, ed. Linda E. Thomas (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 42.

churches to be continuously engaged in the process of ‘revaluing value.’¹⁹ Both of these statements underscores the need for a distinctive theological voice for black women that does not exclude the needs of black men, children or any who have been labeled as ‘other’ by society. Womanism understands that within the study of theology are also the sociological, ethical and practical needs and issues of women and men. Womanist theology rejects the use of monolithic determinants of authority and exclusivity to God-language. It encourages the use of inclusive language which validates the humanity and divine nature within all peoples. Jacquelyn Grant states “the task of womanist theologians is to recognize the power of language; to overcome the power of oppressive language; and to effect the [em]power[ment] of liberating language about humanity and about God.”²⁰

Jacquelyn Grant’s pioneering work *White Woman’s Christ and Black Women’s Jesus* raises questions about the different ways black and white women experience and understand Jesus through her study of feminist theology and the rise of black feminist thought. She challenges the assumption of the primacy of white women’s experience as the primary source of Christology for all women. Grant argues that racism, sexism, and classism as a conglomerate representation is the starting point for doing a wholistic theology and Christology.²¹ She suggests that the use of male resources as the foundation for the development of feminist theology allows the perpetuation of white supremacist ideologies and the disregard of others existential realities. Grant says “even if some

¹⁹ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 170.

²⁰ Jacquelyn Grant, “The Power of Language,” in *The Journal of the I.T.C.* (Winter 2006): 93.

²¹ Jacquelyn Grant, *White Woman’s Christ and Black Women’s Jesus* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 5.

individual feminists are not racists, the movement has been so structured, and therefore takes on a racist character. In a racist society, the oppressor assumes the power of definition and control while the oppressed is objectified and perceived as a thing.²² Despite her critique of white feminism Grant suggests that it is beneficial in igniting a curiosity within black women to begin to engage in theological reflection around issues of gender, sexism and race in relation to faith and religion. She also challenged the black church and black theologians to expand their dialogue beyond just issues of racial oppression to include issues of sexism within the black church context.

Delores Williams *Sisters in the Wilderness* explored the biblical character Hagar, the slave woman of Abraham and Sarah, as representative of the experiences of black women. Through this interrogation of the sources she challenged the church and black theologians to reexamine biblical sources and doctrine to be inclusive of the plight of black women in the movement towards a truly liberative theology. She saw a need for black women to begin to transform the sexist character of the church and theology. Williams challenges the claims that the androcentric language of black liberation theology is inclusive of black women. She asserts that for black liberation theology to truly be inclusive it must “be conscious of what has been invisible in the text and to acknowledge that their work is in collusion with the “invisibilization” of the black women’s experience.”²³

Even as black theologians developed a black theological perspective of racism as the nexus for oppression and gave voice to the “black experience” they continued to

²² Grant, *White Woman’s Christ*, 199.

²³ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 149.

perpetuate the concept of a male dominance.²⁴ There was little to no attention paid to the continued oppression and marginalization of black women within the black church or society. Despite the calls of the black male theologians for liberation from white hierarchy, sexism was still prevalent in black denominational structures as women were still met with opposition to ordination and leadership roles traditionally held by men. Despite the focus on the liberation of the black race, black liberation theology was indifferent to the elevating the status of black women beyond traditional hierarchal roles. Women were denied the ability to self-determination as many churches continued to perpetuate the idea of male leadership being the divine mandate. Women could only hold leadership within organizations which were considered socially acceptable women's groups such as missionary or benevolent society leaders. Vashti McKenzie posits that support or rejection of female leadership in the church can be traced to traditional male articulated arguments associated with Karl Barth's elevation of the Word of God alone above human experience as the starting point for doing theology.²⁵ To interpret the Bible devoid of the human experience does not allow room for examination of historical or cultural influences or biases of the authors who wrote from a patriarchal perspective consistent with their times. McKenzie suggests this is problematic for liberation theologians who challenge a universal experience of God especially one which places dominant culture male voices at the center as the lone authority for doing theology at the expense of other voices.²⁶ If liberation theology is to be truly liberative for all people it

²⁴ Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 6.

²⁵ McKenzie, *Not Without A Struggle*, 41.

²⁶ McKenzie, *Not Without A Struggle*, 41.

must engage a more egalitarian view which challenges the patriarchal status quo and deconstructs the hierarchal structures of race, class, gender and sex to make room for the voices of all to be represented.

Womanism holds sacred the idea of an inclusive and holistic approach to theology understanding that it is imperative that theology be done not primarily from the top but also from the bottom. For those who engage womanist theology it is a vehicle for the articulation of an inclusive theology which brings the voices of the marginalized and the disenfranchised to the center of church, society and the academy. Womanist theologians do not seek to deny biblical truths or the relevance of the church as do some feminists. Rather they believe in the centrality of the bible as providing opportunities to engage and interpret text through the lens of their lived experiences. The ability to critically examine biblical text through magnification of the voices of persons outside of the dominant culture supports the development of a theology which validates the lived experiences of those previously not considered valuable as central to ensuring the wholeness and health of the faith community.

Womanist theology uses an interdisciplinary approach to doing theology which includes disciplines of sociology, ethics, history, anthropology and cultural studies.²⁷ Many of the womanist scholars like Katie Geneva Canon, Marcia Y. Riggs, Delores Williams and Emilie Townes were ethicists who understood that to write and tell black women stories required engaging various disciplines. Jacquelyn Grant and Renita Weems were biblical scholars who based the construction of their womanist insight on

²⁷ Stephanie Mitchem, "Finding Questions and Answers in Womanist Theology and Ethics," in *Feminist Theologies: Legacy and Prospect* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 68-9.

their interrogation of scripture from what Grant calls the underside, reading from the lens of the oppressed.

Emphasis on the importance of black women's lived experiences as integral to the formation of self-perception and understanding of self along with the commitment to women telling their own stories was the reason this theology was chosen. As the population of the context for this project is primarily African American the use of a theology that takes into consideration the needs and concerns which are specific to black women was a primary concern. Understanding the historical, biblical and social dynamics of the tri-dimensional oppressions of race, class and gender on development of positive self-worth and self-efficacy was critical. The realization that many of the women in the context of Ward Chapel have internalized stereotypes which limit their agency and perception of worth requires the intentional study of those mitigating factors to move towards development of new self-image. Stephanie Mitchem states "other language than that of the dominant society is needed to discuss black women's apprehensions of themselves as women."²⁸ The messages of society continue to perpetuate the devaluation of black women who struggle to find positive representation in the mediums of the dominant society. Cheryl Townsend Gilkes states "as part of racial of the racial oppression that African American people experience, cultural humiliation based on beauty norms has serious implications for the self-esteem of African American Women and men. Such concerns may seem trivial in the face of drugs, violence and poverty, and social isolation, but many current social problems are often tied to low self-

²⁸ Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology*, 6.

esteem or self-hatred.²⁹ There remain few positive portrayals of black women in film, television and literature that are free from the stereotypes of history which continue to promulgate the message that regardless of achievement black women are still ‘not good enough’ despite attempts to conform to idealized standards of womanhood.³⁰ Womanist theology provides a platform for development of a counter-narrative to the stereotypes and stigmas associated with black womanhood based on life experiences and the biblical narrative.

Womanist theology opens the door to explore the societal forces which have been put in place to disempower marginalized voices by providing space for the sharing of personal witness and testimony. Mitchem calls this a form of gender entrapment which points to the disempowering of black women as a part of patriarchy she shares as a counterbalance to this disempowerment the words of Bell Hooks who emphasizes the role of self-care as a vehicle for empowerment.³¹

As this author examined various liberation theologies to determine which would be most beneficial to this project the lack of emphasis on race within Feminist theology proved problematic. America is a society in which the concept of race as an indicator of worth is deeply embedded and serves to maintain the structures of white supremacy leaving black women outside the margins of what is considered normal. The societal concept of race in America has served to promote a definition of black womanhood which is often demeaning and derogatory. The subtle message of the inferiority of black

²⁹ Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, “The Loves and Troubles of African American Women’s Bodies,” in *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, ed. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela D. Sims (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Publishing, 2011), 81.

³⁰ Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology*, 9.

³¹ Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology*, 9.

women's body, appearance and ability has served to both undermine and initiate the struggle to self-identify and claim agency over their narrative. Mitchem proffers that agency refers to a visioning gift that helps a person see beyond merely survival to begin to work for liberation from social structures and institutions of oppression.³²

Yolanda Y. Smith offers three insights of womanist theology which can be used to empower black women through Christian education. They are:

The celebration of culture and traditions of African American religious heritage, life, legacy and contributions of Black women who embody womanist ideals; equipping women to engage in serious critique of oppressive systems that contribute to the oppression of black women and marginalized people and the willingness to explore new possibilities and innovative models of Christian Education.³³

Within these insights emerge methods for engaging women in discovery of self-worth and identity. The celebration of culture and traditions provides a foundation to reclaim history, place value on traditions and reclaim narratives from the past on which to build. The critique of oppressive systems empowers women to challenge oppressive images and symbols by envisioning new possibilities for transformation and change. Innovative models of Christian education also open the opportunity to engage in mutual dialogue and mentoring of one another.³⁴

The project design is to use some of the models of womanist Christian education to raise awareness and assist women to understand the influence of low or negative self-worth and self-efficacy on their willingness to assume leadership roles. The intent is to

³² Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology*, 21.

³³ Yolanda Y. Smith, "Womanist Theology: Empowering Black Women through Christian Education," *Black Theology* 6, no. 2 (May 2008): 207-14. doi:10.1558/blth2008v6i2.200.

³⁴ Smith, "Womanist Theology," 213.

educate participants in the historical, societal and biblical factors which influence the development of a positive self-worth and efficacy using some of the tools of womanist theology. The centrality and importance of telling individual stories and being able to self-name utilized in womanist theology will provide the tools for teaching and reflection. Brenda J. Hayes states “as contemporary women recognize where their own stories of faith and calling intersect with the stories of biblical women pioneers of the early church, they will gain a sense of identity as those valued and included in God’s vision, not as second class, substrata or nonhumans, but full participants in kingdom building.”³⁵

When answering the question of why womanist theology it is because womanist theology holds personal and communal experience as key to constructing theology. Additionally, the concept of group engagement in learning employed by womanist theology seems ideal for executing a program in a church setting. It opens the door for group and individual reflection on traditional interpretations of text while granting permission to explore the text from their unique perspective to create a new narrative of understanding. Womanist theology will allow for the examination and evaluation of theological and liberation ideologies which have influenced development of identity, efficacy, value and agency. The project design follows the model of womanist education by creating safe space for development of mutually respectable relationships necessary for the engagement in dialogue and reflection to aid in discovery of self-worth and self-efficacy.

Womanist theology offers a prescription for what ails our society today because of its understanding that the struggle for liberation must be inclusive of all in the

³⁵ Hayes, *Eye Has Not Seen*, 45.

community. The inclusive nature of womanist theology, which is concerned not just with black women, but also about violence in the community and its effect on the quality of life of the inhabitants; its concern with the environment and the availability of resources to sustain the community; its concern with the health and wellbeing of the inhabitants of the community, provides a wide door through which women can enter to discover and define their personal sense of self-worth and self-efficacy.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

This chapter will explore self-esteem and self-worth as primary factors in a woman's reticence to assume leadership through the discipline of psychology. Throughout this project, this author has looked at the biblical, historical and theological influences on the development of a woman's self-esteem, worth and efficacy. It is posited that perceptions of self-worth and efficacy have a direct influence on a woman's willingness to assume positions of leadership. Within the discipline of psychology many scholars have conducted extensive research on the issues of self-perception and the influences of patriarchy on development of positive self-perception. Their work provides additional insight into the interactions between women's perceptions of worth and efficacy as related to their attitudes towards leadership. The intent of this chapter is to provide greater support for the thesis of the research which is through greater understanding of the diverse factors influencing the development of positive self-image women, will gain greater insight into their reticence to assume leadership positions.

The issue identified at Ward Chapel AME Church was that the changing demographic composition of the church has created a leadership vacuum as male membership has decreased. There is a need for women, who comprise approximately eighty percent of the congregation, to assume non-traditional leadership roles within the

church. As the need for women to assume positions on the Trustee and Steward Boards within the church has increased, there has been resistance on the part of women when approached to accept appointments to these offices. The response of “not me, I can’t lead, I work in the background” implies a sense of diminished self-perception, worthiness and ability. This author recognized that she had also utilized these same responses in the past when asked to lead. It was not until much later that the author began to make the correlation between low self-perception and a willingness to assume leadership. Through the process of self-evaluation and reflection, recognition of the influence of self-worth and self-esteem on a willingness to assume leadership and recognition of similar traits among the women of Ward Chapel AME laid the foundation for this thesis.

The study of self-esteem, self-worth and self-efficacy became a focused area of concentrated study by psychologists in the late twentieth century. Psychology is defined as the study of how the mind works and how it influences behavior or the influence of character on a particular person’s behavior.¹ Examining the approach of psychology to the study of self-esteem, self-worth and efficacy is integral to an interdisciplinary understanding of the underlying barriers to positive self-perception and development of female leadership in the church.

There has been extensive research and writing on self-esteem, self-worth and efficacy in the sciences of psychology and sociology. The specific areas to be addressed in the chapter will include a brief explanation and review of Positive Psychology and two theories related to self-esteem, Social Comparison Theory and Cognitive Consistency Theory. Cognitive Consistency Theory will provide insight into the relationship of self-

¹ Cambridge Dictionary Online, s.v. “Psychology,” accessed August 6, 2019, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/psychology>.

perception and God-images while Social Comparison Theory provides foundation for the concepts of community identity. There will be a brief discussion of the role of gender, race and patriarchy on self-esteem, worth and disposition towards leadership.

The intent is to analyze and compare the concepts presented in the previous biblical, theological and historical chapters on development of self-perception to findings in psychology. The biblical foundation chapter suggested a correlation between patriarchal biblical interpretation and its influence on development of positive self-image in women. The examination of psychology will serve to reinforce the validity of the author's assumption that patriarchal biblical interpretation and attitude has a potentially negative influence on the development of positive self-image and self-efficacy in women whereas womanist biblical interpretation reinforces positive self-worth and value.

The historical foundations chapter identified the significant impact of historical stereotypes, internalized oppression and structural constructs of gender and race on the development of positive self-esteem and efficacy particularly in women of color. The research done by psychologists on the correlation between internalization of negative stereotypes and feelings of worth and efficacy will support the historical chapter's emphasis on the need to deconstruct negative stereotypes as pivotal in the development of positive self-perception. Finally, the role of psychology and religion to assist persons to self-name and define will support the findings of the theological chapter which espoused the significant impact of both personal and communal experience and relationship with the Divine as key to constructing positive self-image. It is the belief of this author that many of the assumptions of the previous chapters will be supported through the examination of self-esteem and through the discipline of psychology.

Many researchers have provided definitions of self-esteem. In *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, Nathaniel Branden, defines self-esteem as the disposition to experience oneself as competent to cope with the basic challenges of life as worthy of happiness.² Branden's definition integrates the concepts of cognitive ability, competence and value under the umbrella of self-esteem. Heatherton and Wyland define self-esteem as "the evaluative aspect of the self-concept that corresponds to an overall view of the self as worthy or unworthy (Baumeister, 1998)."³ Croker and Knight define self-esteem according to what they term "contingencies of worth" meaning the degree of self-esteem is only important in how it relates to what a person believes they need to do or be to validate their worth.⁴ John P. Hewitt provides a concise definition of self-esteem as being the evaluative dimension of the self which ranges from positive or self-affirming to negative or self-denigrating.⁵

It is important to note that the terms self-esteem and self-worth have at times been used interchangeably, however, through the course of my research distinct differences have been noted which warrant discussion here. In the biblical foundations chapter, it was stated that self-esteem/self-worth was a belief in one's value and being which could be both positive and negative and was informed by society, relationships and faith without differentiating it from self-esteem. Self-efficacy was stated as an understanding

² Nathaniel Branden, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem* (New York, NY: Bantam, 1994), 27.

³ Todd Heatherton and Carrie Wyland, "Assessing Self Esteem," Semantic Scholar, accessed May 10, 2019, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1ae0/788f6a1c370c21aa66b4e8ab8491948a0e29.pdf>.

⁴ Jennifer Crocker and Katherine M. Knight, "Contingencies of Self-Worth," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 14, no. 4 (2005): 200, accessed July 17, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20183024>.

⁵ John P. Hewitt, "The Social Construction of Self-Esteem," in *The Handbook of Positive Psychology*, ed. C. R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 135.

of one's ability to assume and complete tasks with a reasonable assumption of accomplishment. Albert P. Bandura's definition for self-esteem and self-efficacy undergird the definitions proposed in the biblical chapter. He also suggests that self-esteem and self-efficacy though frequently used interchangeably they are in his opinion very different concepts. He theorizes that "self-efficacy is concerned with judgements of personal capability, whereas self-esteem is concerned with judgements of self-worth. There is no fixed relationship between beliefs about one's capabilities and whether one likes or dislikes oneself."⁶ In discussion of the variety of definitions associated with self-esteem and self-efficacy, self-worth is often integrated into the definition of self-esteem with the self-evaluative quality of both being the common link.

Positive Psychology, according to Martin Seligman, Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, seeks to move psychology from merely a focus on treating behavioral disease and illness toward a more holistic approach to include the study of positive human traits and strengths which buffer against illness.⁷ The study of self-esteem, self-worth and self-efficacy are integral to positive prevention theory and therapy. Positive psychology posits that humans have strengths which buffer against mental illness such as courage, future-mindedness, optimism, interpersonal skills, faith, work ethic, hope, honesty, perseverance and the capacity for insight and evaluation.⁸ The approach of Positive Psychology provides support and validation to the approach of this author as the design of the project is to affirm the worth and value in women who may

⁶ Albert P. Bandura, *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control* (New York, NY: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1997).

⁷ Martin E. P. Seligman, "Positive Psychology, Positive Prevention, and Positive Therapy," in *The Handbook of Positive Psychology* (New York, NY: Oxford Press, 2002), 5.

⁸ Seligmann, "Positive Psychology," 5.

have a diminished self-perception through enhanced knowledge of external and internal barriers to positive self-image. By providing opportunities to explore the historical, social and theological influences on self-esteem in a mutually respectable environment participants are afforded opportunities for transformation through positive interactions with group members. The potential for transformation through positive interactions affirming the worth of an individual was examined in the biblical chapter in which a positive encounter with Jesus became the catalyst for development of a new self-perception and enhanced self-worth.

Social Comparison Theory (SCT), a discipline within social psychology, theorizes that through comparisons with other persons individuals begin to formulate a sense of self-worth and efficacy. In as much as the historical foundation chapter analyzed the impact of the Black Women's Club Movement on the development of positive self-worth Social Comparison Theory provides support for this author's thesis that participation in mutually respected groups can enhance feelings of worth and efficacy. Social Comparison Theory considers emotions, feelings, personality and competency. In 1954, Festinger theorized that "other people who are similar to an individual are especially useful to that individual in generating accurate (self) evaluations of his or her abilities or opinions"⁹ Through social comparison, an individual engages in self-evaluation processes whether implicit or explicit to serve as a barometer of past as well as future potential and behavioral outcomes.

⁹ Jerry Suls, René Martin, and Ladd Wheeler, "Social Comparison: Why, with Whom, and with What Effect?" *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 11, no. 5 (2002): 159, accessed August 7, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20182799>.

Social Comparison Theory provides insight into the thought patterns which form a person's sense of self. Paul Van Lange in "Social Comparison Is Basic to Social Psychology," posits that "social comparison processes at the group and cultural level whether implicit or explicit are important to understanding self-esteem, self-construct, attitudes, emotions, prejudice, discrimination and more."¹⁰ Lang suggests three areas where this relationship is most evident, each of which appear to strengthen the research findings in the previous chapters. He states:

First, social comparison is basic to understanding how people think, feel, act and interact. It is basic to understanding the reciprocal influence between an individual and the social environment as has defined social psychology. After all, psychologically, the self-influences how one construes the social environment, be it other individuals or other groups. And information from other groups influences how we think, feel, act and interact. Second, social comparison is essential to understanding some key societal developments. For example, issues having to do with national identity, ethnocentrism, individualism, gender, equality and solidarity probably are insufficiently understood without some basic knowledge of social comparison processes at the group level and cultural level. Third, by noting that culture may influence social comparison orientation or that self-esteem or emotions are influenced by intergroup comparisons one crossing different levels of analysis which can have strong theoretical and societal benefits.¹¹

This theory reminds us that we do not develop our sense of self in isolation, but our identity and sense of worth is the culmination and intersection of our personal experiences and environment over a lifetime as well as our interpretation of the societal, religious and cultural collective experiences. Heatherton and Wyland expound on the role of social comparison by asserting that, in addition to, an individual's perception of self, there is also a collective self-esteem which is informed by norms, values and culture

¹⁰ Paul Van Lange, "Social Comparison Is Basic to Social Psychology," *The American Journal of Psychology* 121, no. 1 (2008): 169-72, accessed August 7, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20445451>.

¹¹ Van Lange, "Social Comparison Is Basic to Social Psychology," 170, accessed August 7, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20445451>.

of the group in which the individual belongs.¹² The concept of this collective self-esteem is important as we assess the historical impact of stereotypes and oppressions on entire groups which have directly affected the development of a positive self-worth and efficacy. Bandura theorizes that:

Cultural stereotyping is another way in which evaluative social judgements affect a sense of self-worth. People are often cast in to valued or devalued groups on the basis of their ethnicity, race, sex, or physical characteristics. They then get treated in terms of the social stereotype rather than on the basis of their actual individuality. In those situations that give salience to the stereotype, those stereotyped suffer losses in self-esteem. Devaluative societal practices are usually clothes in social justifications that fault the disfavored groups for their maltreatment. Justified devaluation can have more devastating effects on judgments of self-worth than acknowledged antipathy.¹³

As was discussed in the historical chapter external factors such as race, gender, ethnicity and social status had a direct influence on the development of positive self-image particularly among African American women who have historically been stereotyped and dehumanized through structural racism which reinforced the perceptions of inferiority and unworthiness. The denigration of an entire group through societal justification of the devaluation based on race is the story of African Americans in America. Individuals regardless of competency, talent, ability or social status and who are often evaluated based on social stereotyping are susceptible to experiencing diminished self-perception due to being in an associated group considered inferior. This is particularly true in the case of African American women as expounded upon by Carolyn M. West, Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Washington at Tacoma, who writes in her

¹² Heatherton and Wyland, *Assessing Self Esteem*, 221.

¹³ Bandura, *Self-Efficacy*.

article “Mammy, Jezebel and Sapphire: Developing an Oppositional Gaze Towards the Images of Women”:

Exposure to negative images of Black women can build up and cause great harm to the health of Black women. These images don't seem significant because they are deeply ingrained in our society. Because we are surrounded by these images in the media and in our daily lives, it almost appears “natural” or “normal” that Black women should be domestics rather than successful professionals. Certainly television programs stereotype many oppressed groups, including women from all ethnic backgrounds, poor people, and sexual minorities. However, oppressive images may be more damaging for some groups because there are fewer positive or realistic images to counter these negative representations. She goes on to quote Hudson who argued that “on television, one can see relatively little change within the dominant racial ideology because television, as a mass media outlet, provides space which continually updates and re-creates the Mammy and Jezebel stereotypes, and in turn presents them as icons of what black womanhood is today.”¹⁴

When we consider the theory of social comparison, it is evident that cultural influences have a direct impact on the development of self-esteem and self-worth. The impact of social comparison was evident in the women of Ward Chapel AME. It is not unusual to hear the self-deprecating comments when they perceive that they cannot compare to others within the community. It is also evident in the fact that the church originated in a socioeconomically deprived area of the city and although many have since moved from the area with improved socioeconomic status, they still refer to themselves as members of that community. In the context analyzed for this study, it is not unusual to hear even those who have demonstrated abilities in various areas to refer to feeling inadequate without a real basis for their assumption or the ability to associate these feelings with the concept of self-esteem and efficacy.

¹⁴ Carolyn West, “Mammy, Jezebel and Sapphire: Developing an Oppositional Gaze Towards the Images of Black Women,” *Lectures on the Psychology of Women*, 3rd ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw Hill, 2004), 238, accessed July 15, 2019, <http://www.drcarolynwest.com/publications/2004-mammy-jezebel-sapphire.pdf>.

The research of scholars Morris Rosenberg, Carmi Schooler, Carrie Schoenbach, and Florence Rosenberg on global self-esteem and specific self-esteem help to shed light on some of the dissonance that can be present in successful persons who experience low self-esteem as they compare themselves to others. They suggest this unaddressed dissonance is related to concepts of global and specific self-esteem. They define global self-esteem in relationship to psychological well-being, as a person's positive or negative attitudes towards self as a totality and specific self-esteem as directed toward a specific object.¹⁵ Global self-esteem is more closely related to psychological well-being while specific self-esteem is more strongly associated with behavior and behavior outcomes.¹⁶ They suggest that failure to distinguish the distinctive parts of self-esteem during research has led to misunderstanding of results especially as it relates to studies associated with race and self-esteem. They provide evidence of this by suggesting that frequently studies intended to focus on pride in one's race (racial self-esteem) is conflated with the results of studies done on pride in one's self (personal self-esteem) presenting racial self-esteem results as though the study had assessed self-worth.¹⁷

The significance of understanding social comparison theory as it relates to race and ethnicity is illuminated in the work of Bell Hooks (2003), a professor and feminist

¹⁵ Morris Rosenberg et al., "Global Self-Esteem and Specific Self-Esteem: Different Concepts, Different Outcomes," *American Sociological Review* 60, no. 1 (1995): 141, accessed July 17, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2096350>.

¹⁶ Rosenberg et al., "Global Self-Esteem and Specific Self-Esteem," 143, accessed July 17, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2096350>.

¹⁷ Rosenberg et al., "Global Self-Esteem and Specific Self-Esteem," 143, accessed July 17, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2096350>.

scholar, who writes of encounters with her black students attending Ivy League institutions and their struggles with self-esteem. She states:

They were among the best and the brightest and oftentimes the most beautiful, yet they were beset by deep feelings of unworthiness, of ugliness inside and outside. They were overwhelmed by all the choices before them and unable to assert meaningful agency. More often than not they were depressed without knowing why, drugs whether illegal or prescription did not solve the problem and there were more attempted suicides than anyone cared to talk about. From the very first moment I listened to their stories ...what I heard was a profound lack of self-esteem.¹⁸

Hooks goes on to suggest that the prevalence of this collective diminished self-esteem is rooted in the historical oppression, suffering and stereotyping of black people in America. The intentional and systematic cultural dehumanization of African Americans through the institution of chattel slavery, and implementation of policies and laws designed to ensure the continued oppression, degradation and labeling of an entire race as inferior has left indelible marks on the psyche of black people. Hooks posits that the result of this dehumanization has left deep woundedness and perpetual feelings of inadequacy, unworthiness, shame, guilt, and powerlessness even on the most talented and gifted people which are difficult to identify, articulate and therefore have not been healed.¹⁹ Expanding on the negative outcomes of cultural stereotyping suggested by Bandura, Hooks theorizes that beyond the stigma and ostracization by the dominant society the more devastating effects of cultural stereotyping is a collective internalized racial self-hatred.²⁰ The mask of success and self-confidence is often juxtaposed with the

¹⁸ Bell Hooks, *Rock My Soul: Black People and Self-Esteem* (New York, NY: Atria Books, 2003), x-xi.

¹⁹ Hooks, *Rock My Soul*, xii.

²⁰ Hooks, *Rock My Soul*, xii.

dissonance of internalized hatred hiding the pain and fear of inadequacy and inferiority experienced by persons perceived as successful and having high self-esteem.

It seems reasonable to conclude that as programs and projects are developed to assist individuals with moving towards a more positive self-perception the consequences and impact of collective social identity must be included if integration of a healthy self-concept is to occur. The analysis of collective social identity must also include the study of the effects of social comparison within the subgroups of the primary ethnic or racial group. Even as the impact of racism as the impetus for diminished self-esteem was being studied little attention was given to the compounded issues of black women at the intersection of race and gender. As stated in the historical chapter, even as black men strove to begin to espouse a need for black pride and empowerment, black women were still subject to the patriarchal attitudes which denied their value and worth. Black women's self-concept was still framed within the context of their inferiority to black males despite the push for the uplift of the race. Black women continued to be denied agency to operate in positions of leadership and to resist the stereotypical roles associated with true womanhood even as the African American community began to embrace a sense of "black pride."

Additionally, it is the belief of this author that the imagery referred to by Carolyn West of the Jezebel, the Mammy and the Sapphire continues to propagate myths about black womanhood which need to be deconstructed for development of positive self-perception to occur. Black women still struggle to be free from having positive personality traits and self-perceptions framed as negative characteristics for this identified group but as positive assets for others. There is also the struggle against external

expectations which affect self-perception. Bell Hooks observed that many of her black female students, who she taught at institutions such as Oberlin, Yale and others, regardless of socioeconomic status displayed self-doubt and low self-esteem due to the continual expectations on them to achieve and excel.²¹ It would appear that for these student's self-esteem was measured by the degree of self-efficacy they experienced. It seems to this author that psychology alone is insufficient to address the myriad of factors impacting the black female. Central to African American culture is the role of faith, our understanding of God and our perceptions of the nature and character of God are integral components which influence development of our sense of self.

Within both the biblical and theological chapters, it was proposed that both self-worth and self-efficacy are influenced by the perception of one's relationship to God. Therefore, it is important not to just look at self-esteem primarily through the lens of traditional psychological theories without also considering how theology and psychology work in tandem to assist with the healing of woundedness to bring about a holistic healing of our self-perceptions. Many of the theories mentioned previously have not addressed the correlation between religious beliefs and development of positive self-perception. In the biblical foundation chapter, the author posited that self-worth is informed by faith and verified through an understanding of relationship to God. Within the theological paper, the author theorized that through the deconstruction of embedded negative concepts of the role of women in both scripture and society the development of a positive self-perception would emerge as women were able to redefine their concept of self in relationship to the Divine within the context of their personal experience.

²¹ Hooks, *Rock My Soul*, 17.

Benson and Spilka suggest that Cognitive Consistency Theory provides a framework to predict a believer's level of self-esteem and God-images. Consistency Theory suggests that people like to maintain consistency in life and when there is dissonance between beliefs adjustments are made towards realignment. This need for consistency and alignment suggests that positive self-esteem is positively related to loving God-images while negatively to rejecting-impersonal-controlling God images.²²

Eric Johnson, a Christian psychologist, situates his understanding of self-esteem within the hypothesis that one's self-esteem and true value evolve from the knowledge of one's relationship and identity as being "created in the image of God."²³ Carroll Saussy, Ph.D., submits three levels of God-imagery that relates to self-esteem: unconscious God representations formed through a child's interactions with her parents, ideas about God learned through socialization, and the experience of God in one's life.²⁴ Saussy further states that the first the unconscious representations of God and self may have the strongest impact on what she calls good enough self-esteem.²⁵ For Johnson, psychology that seeks to locate self-worth and value solely within the purview of the individual is problematic for Christians because it ignores the interrelation of self-knowledge and knowledge of God which can only come from God.²⁶

²² Peter Benson and Bernard Spilka, "God Image as a Function of Self-Esteem and Locus of Control," *Journal of Scientific Study of Religion* 12, no. 3 (September 1973): 298, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

²³ Eric L. Johnson, "Self-Esteem in the Presence of God," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 17, no. 3 (Fall: 1989): 227, accessed July 17, 2019, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

²⁴ Carroll Saussy, *God Images and Self-Esteem: Empowering Women in a Patriarchal Society* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 52.

²⁵ Saussy, *God Images and Self-Esteem*, 53.

²⁶ Johnson, "Self-Esteem in the Presence of God," 228, accessed July 17, 2019, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

A God-centered self-esteem according to Ho and Sim is defined as “One’s evaluation of self-worth and self-competence (i.e. self-esteem) in the context of God’s love, availability, and ability to help.”²⁷ Additionally, they suggest that this enhanced sense of self-competence is reinforced by belief in a powerful deity who is available to help in difficult times grounded in the words of the Apostle Paul, “but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ’s power may rest on me...For when I am weak, then I am strong” as validation (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

As the research into the historical and theological influences on black women’s self-esteem indicated faith was an important component in the ability of black women to deconstruct negative stereotypes and images. Historically, the origins of many of the organizations which provided training, education and self-improvement opportunities for women originated in the church. The church was the place where women were first afforded opportunities to participate in leadership as they headed benevolent societies and women’s organizations. It was through the disciplines of Feminist and Womanist theology that women began to formulate their own God-language and understanding of the sacred text. The intrinsic need to find validation of worth and value outside of the negative messages of societal constructs of racism and patriarchy assisted women to begin to develop a sense of self in relationship to the divine producing a sense of well-being that often ran counter to reality.

²⁷ Anastasia V. L. Ho and Tick N. Sim, “The Development and Validation of a God-Centered Self-Esteem Scale,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 41, no. 1 (2013): 38, accessed July 15, 2019, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

It must be noted that the ability for women, and particularly black women, to construct a positive self-worth based on a positive God self-esteem has been hindered by the construct of patriarchy and patriarchal attitudes. As has been eluded to previously, the willingness of a person to assume positions of leadership can be linked to one having a positive sense of worth and efficacy which has often been informed by race, gender and patriarchy. Mason, Mason and Matthews state:

There is a need to continually evaluate the relationship between self-esteem, gender, and patriarchal attitudes, especially to determine whether patriarchal attitudes moderate the relationship between gender and self-esteem such that higher levels of patriarchal attitudes lead to greater gender differences in levels of self-esteem. Since attitudes on gender roles among Christians often revolve around questions of patriarchy, (i.e. the degree to which men called to leadership roles in the family, church, and society in general) it follows that the degree of patriarchal attitudes one holds will affect one's leadership aspirations and that this relationship differs for men and women.²⁸

The study of self-esteem as reflected in God-language through psychology and other disciplines is necessary as the need for women to assume greater leadership in the church increases based on changing demographics within the church. Self-esteem and self-worth are located solely in the context of human emotions while behavior is fluctuating and ever changing, it becomes important to develop a more God-centered understanding of one's worth and value. As Christians with the understanding that we are created in the "Imago Dei," the image of God, becomes a powerful tool to assist in the deconstruction of negative stereotypes which influence self-worth and self-esteem.

The intent of this chapter was to utilize the discipline of psychology to reinforce the validity of the author's assumption that patriarchal biblical interpretation and attitudes

²⁸ Christopher Mason, Karen Mason, and Alice Matthews, "Contingencies of Self-Worth," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 14, no. 4 (2005): 246, accessed July 17, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20183024>.

have a potentially negative influence in the development of positive self-image and self-efficacy in women whereas womanist biblical interpretations reinforces positive self-worth and value.

The author believes the research findings associated with the analysis of the psychology of self-esteem are integral for the proposed Doctor of Ministry project. Through analysis of the various theories evidence was provided which validates that there is a significant link to one's understanding of God and the development of positive self-worth. The research also revealed the correlation between aspirations and willingness to lead and the degree of worth and competency an individual believes they possess.

A significant finding for this author was the concept of social comparison theory and the concepts surrounding the development of collective self-esteem and self-identity. This theory provides justification for the project model which is designed to engage group learning as a means of increasing awareness and understanding of structural influences which have led to the development of a collective diminished self-perception. The work of Bell Hooks helps to provide insight into the need for psychology to not only consider racism and black pride as the primary determinants or influences on development of self-esteem among African Americans.

Research and study should also be done as it relates to the lingering and insidious residual effects of racism, patriarchy and internalized oppression, on perceptions of self-worth and value. The discussion of persons considered to be high achievers and possessing high self-esteem yet struggling internally with feelings of self-doubt and diminished self-esteem provided insight into persons within the context who have shied from assuming leadership roles. As the project is developed, this new understanding will

help to guide the development of instructional material to be presented to the women of Ward Chapel as they begin the process of identifying underlying causes of diminished self-worth and the relationship to one's willingness to lead.

Additionally, the work of Ho and Sim around God centered-self-esteem supports the foundational assumptions of this author that as women come to understand their worthiness as rooted in God's unconditional love and acceptance, a transformation in perception of self-worth is possible. It becomes imperative that a project designed to promote transformation in self-perception must include assessment of the participants understanding of their relationship with God. This theory lends credence and support to the findings in the theological foundation chapter that it is essential for women to be able to find God in the sacred text by deconstructing traditional patriarchal readings and interpretations.

The project is designed to include weekly reflections on selected text from a womanist perspective. The review of the literature around the subject of psychology and theology provides greater support to the supposition of the biblical analysis related to the transformational aspects inherent in the text. The interactions between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well demonstrated that the love and acceptance offered by Jesus allowed the woman to embrace her worth and value free of the constraints of society thereby empowering her to re-enter community. The research of Ho and Sims, Johnson and Matthews provide validation for expanding the study of self-esteem past the purely scientific to include the influence of faith on individual's development of self-concepts. A primary focus of the Doctoral Ministry project is to move women to a place of understanding that they are enough because of their identity in God. It was the

assumption of this author during the investigative phase of this project that a primary source of research would be the discipline of psychology. The insights gained will be invaluable in developing an effective model to address women's leadership development through transformed self-perception. The next chapter will discuss how the foundation chapters will inform the project development and implementation.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

The unwillingness of women within the congregation of Ward Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church to assume leadership roles, particularly those traditionally held by men, has resulted in a leadership void. The demographics of this 115-year-old church has shifted from an equal number of men and women to women comprising approximately eighty percent of the total congregation. This demographic shift has exposed the need to develop female leadership to assume non-traditional roles for the church to continue to operate in the most effective way possible.

However, the frequent response of women when asked to lead is “Not Me.” When probed, the women respond by stating that they prefer to work in the background because they do not have the ability to assume leadership roles. It is not unusual in this context to hear women using language which is self-deprecating as it relates to their ability to lead a project or a ministry within the church. They point out perceived inadequacies and seek to remain in supportive roles.

The synergy and four foundation papers assisted in the identification of the project purpose. Through reflection, the correlation between my past responses to assuming leadership roles and those of the women in the context with whom I interact, similar themes emerged. The author recognized many of the defensive mechanisms employed in the past to avoid leadership, through denial of skills, knowledge and ability.

Initial thoughts around a project design included developing a model to empower women who exhibited diminished self-worth and self-confidence to develop a healthy self-worth and embrace of personal power. A critical reflection on the feasibility of changing years of personal perception within the time constraints of a five to six-week project resulted in a redirection of the original intent of the project.

The objective was refined to development of a model to explore, identify and understand the underlying causes of reticence to leadership as it related to perceptions of self-worth and self-efficacy. It became evident that to address issues of self-worth study and exploration of biblical, historical and societal constructs of womanhood was necessary to understand the multi-dimensional factors effecting development of self-perception. The project outcome was to provide a meaningful and effective model to enhance women's understanding of their inherent value and worth, ultimately empowering women to assume greater leadership within Ward Chapel AME Church.

Understanding that the primary contributor to the author's transformed self-perception was realizing that the unconditional love and acceptance of Jesus Christ is offered to everyone and that personal worth was not tied to abilities. This was the catalyst for developing a model to empower women to locate their value and worth in their identity as beloved daughters of God created in God's image rather than societal constructs and definitions of womanhood.

It was imperative to begin the project with a biblical framework which would speak to the issue of the liberation and transformation of self-concept as a path to development of a positive self-image. The author chose the story of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well found in John 4:4-29 with emphasis on verses 28-29a:

But he had to go through Samaria. So, he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! (John 4:4-29 NRSV).

Although this text is often used to further the concept of evangelism, my assertion was that the Samaritan woman would have been unable to evangelize if transformation of perceptions of self-worth and efficacy and liberation from the shame of stereotypes had not occurred. This reconciling of her identity was facilitated by the open and affirming space Jesus provided for honesty concerning her past without judgement. An essential component of this model is creation of safe space to facilitate personal reflection and exploration of their relationship and understanding of God, God's character and their relationship to God in a nonjudgmental and affirming atmosphere. This was particularly important for working with this group as historically, depictions of African American women, in church and society, have often been demeaning and denigrating stereotypes intended to devalue black womanhood.

This historical devaluing of black womanhood precipitated research on the Black Women's Club Movement whose beginning can be traced to the period of the nineteenth century just after the end of the Civil War. The movement grew out of black women's recognition of the devaluation of black womanhood within both the majority society as well as within black society. Research of this movement confirmed the effectiveness of small group meetings as vehicles to deconstruct negative stereotypes and images while

moving towards development of positive self-worth, and efficacy. The relational and mentoring aspects of the movement provided a model for transformational leadership development that was applied to this project through the author's role as group leader.

There was a natural progression from the study of the Black Women's Club Movement to study of Womanist Theology. Just as the Black Women's Club Movement deconstructed negative stereotypes and imagery, womanist theology provided an avenue to begin to construct "God-talk" that was affirming for African American women as interrogation and interpretation of biblical text is done through the experiential lens of black women lives. As the biblical chapter stressed the role of grace, the theological aspects helped women to find themselves in the sacred text free from patriarchal interpretation to discover the divine in themselves. The inclusive nature of womanist theology also supported the importance and impact of inclusivity, collective learning and discovery which affirmed the small group model for the project. The women were encouraged to read, reflect and interpret the text in new ways placing themselves at the center of the biblical stories. The opportunity to share insights with the group provided space for participants to challenge previous understandings of text and how they have been interpreted historically.

In seeking greater insight into understanding societal influences on self-perception a reasonable course of inquiry would be a study of research already done within the discipline of psychology on self-worth and self-perception. Review of multiple scholarly sources within psychology provided insight into the relationship between development of self-perception and attitudes towards leadership. Psychology, particularly Social Comparison Theory and Cognitive Consistency Theory, established

correlation between previously explored influencers of gender, race, and patriarchy on the development of positive self-perception. Just as the positive interaction of the Samaritan Woman at the Well with Jesus produced positive transformation. I believe that utilizing a Positive Psychology framework, which includes affirmation of worth, for the project provided an atmosphere in which transformation of self-perception was nurtured.

The knowledge gleaned from each of the foundational chapters provided a meaningful and effective project model which enhanced the participants understanding of their inherent value and worth. Through participation in the project participants gained greater understanding of the underlying causes of reticence to leadership as related to perceptions of self-worth and efficacy through multiple disciplines which allowed them to reflect on their own perceptions of leadership ability. The anticipated outcome of assisting participants to better understand and be able to identify and articulate the relationship between self-perception and willingness to operate in leadership was confirmed through the post-survey and evaluation. Through application of this new knowledge participants are empowered to assume greater leadership within Ward Chapel AME Church.

Methodology

Using a concept from the Black Women's Club Movement, the project was designed utilizing the small study group model. Limiting group size to six to ten participants allowed for the creation of a mutually respectful and safe environment to facilitate dialogue, introspection, and transparency. The project followed Karen Tye's, professor of Christian Education at Eden Theological Seminary, design of a three process

model of Christian Education in which education is experiential, reflective and relational.¹ This process allowed for an interactive structure to the group learning experience in which participants were asked to engage nightly in discussions and activities. Over six-weeks the group studied biblical, historical, theological and societal constructs of womanhood. Pre and post-surveys, use of open-ended questions, instructional period, group discussions, reflection on scripture passages, and journaling were used to evaluate the process and assess effectiveness of learning.

Implementation

Participants in this project were African American female members of Ward Chapel, both clergy and lay persons. An open appeal was made to the women in the church soliciting their participation in the project. Eight persons responded at which time a personal invitation to participate was made by the director of the project. They were provided more specific information regarding purpose of the project and the subject matter. Upon agreement to participate, they were provided a personal letter requesting their participation with an outline of the project topics and a consent to participate form to return during the first session.

The original implementation dates of July 8, 15, 22, 29, August 5 and 12, 2019 required adjusting due to unforeseen obligations of several participants and the author. During the orientation session held on July 18, 2019 the group discussed and agreed upon revised meeting dates and times. The revised dates were July 18, July 25, August 1, 8, 13

¹ Karen B. Tye, *Basics of Christian Education* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 93.

and August 18, 2019. Each session was held from 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. with a light meal served.

Eight women attended the orientation session, two ordained clergy and six lay persons ranging in age from thirty to sixty-five. Three married, two widows, one divorced, two singles - never married. There were two ordained clergy persons and one lay person who currently holds a leadership position within the church. The other participants were lay members who did not hold any leadership in the church and were not actively involved in any of the ministries of the church. After the orientation session, one of the clergy persons dropped from the group and did not complete the classes.

Each of the sessions included a focus on the aspect of formation of self-perception as identified in the foundational chapters which included instruction on the biblical, historical, theological and societal constructs of womanhood. Pre and post-surveys, instruction, group discussions, reflection on scripture passages, and journaling were used to evaluate the process and assess effectiveness of learning. A class evaluation was done at the end of the six weeks to evaluate effectiveness of the process and benefits of the class.

Each session design consisted of seven parts: (1) centering reflection on a biblical text and journaling (2) brief review of previous week's subject with questions and answers (3) instructional period introducing the week's focus and presenting pertinent information (4) group discussion of the material (5) time for reflection and journaling (6) short verbal 'check-in' evaluation asking participants to share one feeling word about the class time (7) assignment in preparation for the next class. Each session included an

opening and closing prayer. Reflective journaling assignments were given for each week to allow time to process the previous week's learning.

Session One – Orientation

During the project orientation they were given an overview of the project focus, participation requirements, time commitment and weekly class schedule with subject focus. The HSR consent form was reviewed along with the risks and benefits of participation. Discussions on the importance of confidentiality and creating a safe space were held. Participants collectively developed a list of rules and expectations to be observed during each session. Some of the agreed upon rules were that the group was a safe space where discussions would be held in confidentiality, without judgment or blame. Each person would participate in discussions with honesty and transparency. Each participant received a journal with a randomly assigned number written on the inside cover, this number was used as the identifier on all surveys and assessments to maintain anonymity and confidentiality to encourage honesty and transparency.

They were given the pre-survey to complete. Survey questions were reviewed by professional associates before administration. The survey was to establish a baseline understanding of current knowledge of different facets of self-worth and to use as comparison at the completion of the project to assess if any change in perception occurred.

The concept of "Why Not Me" understanding the reticence of women to willingly assume leadership as it relates to perceptions of self-worth was presented. Discussion of some of the project designer's research and assumptions were shared as the basis for this

project. Participants were asked to read and reflect on John 4:4-29. The group discussion of their understanding of the text revealed many of the traditional interpretations. Several when asked to describe the woman used terms such as loose, immoral, and a person of low self-esteem because she had many husbands; they felt she did not have any pride in herself. When probed they shared that these were words, they had frequently heard used to describe the woman in sermons and Bible study. They also felt as though the woman displayed a lack of respect for Jesus in her questioning and doubting.

Instruction was provided using a womanist approach to the text intended to enhance understanding of the social, religious and historical setting as related to the role and status of women in the Ancient Near East. The instruction focused on the importance of the interpersonal dialogue of Jesus with someone considered undesirable by the larger community as evidence of how a womanist reading reveals the liberating nature of grace and personal transformation that occurred. Several group members shared that they had not considered how social and religious constructs had influenced the way story has frequently been presented. Several stated they often felt unaccepted in groups as though they did not fit in; and they could relate to the woman traveling alone to the well. When probed they shared that they often did not feel confident enough in their intellect or ability to speak up or participate so they tried to avoid being in uncomfortable spaces. They were instructed to journal their feelings and to consider what change in perception might be possible if they were to have a personal encounter with Jesus.

Session Two: Defining Self-Worth and Self-Efficacy

The class period began with a reflection on Genesis 1:27, “Then God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Discussion of the reflection time in general revealed that participants found the text comforting; the thought of imagining being made in God’s image. However, one stated she found it hard to think of being in God’s image because the only God image she had was male. Another voiced that she had not thought about the inclusiveness of this text because most of the time in talking of the creation of women she had predominantly focused on the text in Genesis where woman is taken from Adam’s side. A brief discussion of the historical reasons for the two creation stories was held.

The instructional focus for the session was on concepts of development of self-esteem from the field of psychology. Discussion focus was on the following areas:

1. Nathaniel Branden’s Six Pillars of Self-Esteem
2. Definitions of: Self Esteem; Self-Worth; Self-Efficacy
3. Importance of Positive Self-Esteem
4. Contributing Factors to Development of Self-Esteem

The instructional moment began with a discussion of the Six Pillars of Self-Esteem suggested by Nathaniel Branden. The pillars are personal integrity, self-acceptance, self-responsibility, self-assertion, living consciously, and living purposefully. Utilizing a flipchart, participants were asked to share ideas about each of the pillars. They were then asked to provide words they felt indicated positive self-esteem, followed by words which indicated low self-esteem. Robust discussion was had around ways in which low self-esteem may manifest especially in persons who exhibit characteristics of success and

self-confidence but internally struggle with self-doubt. Three of the seven participants self-identified with having the struggle of consistently trying to appear as though they are confident while struggling with doubt and low self-esteem. Two others recognized that their self-perception had prevented them from achieving certain goals due to fear of failure, feeling intimidated by others and fear of rejection. Discussion around the dissonance between self-worth and self-efficacy focused on understanding that value is not in abilities rather it is in the acceptance and love of God. It was evident from responses several participants equated worth with ability and with the environment in which they had been raised. The group brainstormed ways to move toward enhanced self-image produced responses such as: be gentle with self when feeling vulnerable, use positive affirmations, celebrate small successes, forgive self when mistakes are made, surround yourself with positive people and remember I am not what I do. Journal assignment find a biblical character who reflects positive self-worth and one who exhibited diminished self-worth.

Session Three – Historical Portrayals of Black Women Influencing Self-Perception

Meditation scripture was Psalm 139:13-14, “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.” Instructional period focused on how historical and structural systems of oppression based on race, class, and gender have influenced development of self-worth in black women. Class content included:

Historical Overview

1. 1619 -1643 – overview of history of chattel slavery devaluation of black womanhood
2. The “cult of true womanhood, the cult of domesticity”
3. Historical Stereotypes of Black Women: Jezebel; Sapphire; Mammy and Matriarch
4. Other historical/social factors affecting development of self-image
Eurocentric societal standards of beauty - colorism; hair color and texture, body type and weight Media images

The author taught on how historical characterizations and stereotypes continue to affect the development of positive self-worth and efficacy. The group reviewed ways that these stereotypes are still being used today and how the perpetuation of these images continue to influence both personal and societal perceptions of black women. A key component of the teaching placed emphasis on how characteristics viewed as positive in other races or gender groups, such as assertiveness, confidence and intelligence, have often been given negative connotations when associated with black women. How feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt have been the result of the stereotyping. The Black Women’s Club Movement was used as an example of how to resist and deconstruct these negative images. Group discussion engaged the concepts of mentoring and modeling behavior as response to negative imagery. Women were asked to name barriers to deconstructing the negative stereotypes. Several women voiced their concern that many of these images have become normalized through music and videos. The women noted a need for more opportunities for intergenerational interaction at the church and discussed ways to engage in mentoring. They recommended that additional small group classes on subjects of interest to young women could be a first step to engage younger women in the church.

Session Four – Reading the Bible through a Womanist Lens

The meditation period began with a reflection on John 4:4-29 as participants were asked to reflect on the text considering what they had learned to date in class. The responses showed more empathy for the woman than during the discussion from the first class. The word most associated with her during this class was courageous as they saw her return to the community as courageous.

The instructional time was devoted to understanding womanist theology as foundational in facilitating transformation of women's perceptions of self-worth through faith formation, engagement with biblical texts through the lens of black women's lived experiences, and analysis of the ecclesiastical structures that inform our understanding of God. The class outline included:

1. History of liberation theology – from black to feminist to womanist theology
2. Why womanist theology? - Black women realized that their concerns were not being addressed by either black liberation or feminist theology.
3. Double jeopardy = black and female ... Triple jeopardy = black, female and in church (racism, sexism, classism)
4. Womanism – a holistic approach
5. Begin to understand God through our personal experiences
6. Storytelling as faith formation
7. Claiming our place – inclusive language

The instruction included a review of the patriarchal nature of traditional biblical interpretation and how it has been used to create hierarchal structures even in the church. The group reviewed the origin of black liberation theology as resistance to racism and how despite the focus on liberation women were excluded. The role of telling our own

stories and reflecting on how God has been present in our lives was the bulk of the discussion. The author emphasized how important it was to reflect on our own understandings of the nature and character of God in their own language. The author taught on the power of using inclusive language when reading the biblical text to better embrace that women are made in God's image, just like males. Genesis 1:27 was revisited. Discussion ensued regarding the definition of God as 'spirit' thereby gender neutral. The suggestion was made to practice using proper names for God in place of gendered pronouns. The women were asked if they had ever shared their spiritual journeys? Everyone said yes, with the exception of two participants and they replied no. Several said they did not want to think about the past. They were encouraged to use their journal to explore their understanding of God and their relationship with God. A handout providing instructions for writing a spiritual autobiography was shared.

Session Five – “Why Not Me” – I am Enough Moving Towards a Positive Self-Worth

The meditation period focused on Esther 4:14b “Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.” Participants were asked to reflect on the theme of “Why Not Me” as they meditated on the assigned text. Sharing amongst the group revealed that some felt challenged to move out of their comfort zones to try something new. One participant stated she had turned down an opportunity because of fear and the text was causing her to question her decision. One lay person expressed that change was scary for her, but she was realizing that it was scarier not to change because she might be missing out on a blessing.

The instructional period focused on embracing yourself as worthy and valuable.

The class content included the following:

- I. I Am Enough
 - I define me – embrace the power to re-create and heal myself
 - Deconstruct patriarchal ideals of womanhood
 - Embrace your spiritual power – find your voice, peel off expectations of others; know the difference between guilt and shame
 - Find the Goddess in you – find your God language; daily affirmations; prayer and meditation; take a chance on you-step out of the box

- II. Speak over Yourself –
 - Remember to quiet the inner critic
 - Be gentle with expectations of yourself
 - Get help when needed

- III. Why Not Me? – I Have the Right Stuff to Lead
 - Characteristics of a good leader – integrity, compassion, know your limitations, responsible, empowering, confident
 - Lead by example
 - Do not take yourself too seriously - mistakes happen learn from them

Participants were asked to create a vision board with words and images which expressed their feelings about their personal worth and efficacy. There was much laughter and persons finding words to share with others. The resulting vision boards demonstrated movement towards enhanced self-perception and understanding. Using the concept of affirmation from Positive Psychology, each participant was given eight slips of paper at the end of the class period and instructed to take them home to write a prayer or affirmation for each member of the group to be shared during the last session.

Session Seven – Celebration and Evaluation

Luke 1:38 provided the focus for the opening meditation. Participants were asked to frame their reflection by considering it in the context of a call to leadership. Insights gained from their reflection included feelings of validation that God was present with

them, realization that even when they do not understand what they are to do; God knows, and they must be willing to trust God to help. One participant said she felt a challenge to move out of her comfort zone to try something new.

The instruction moment was a reading again of the story of the Samaritan Woman at the Well looking at verses twenty-eight and twenty-nine. Raising the question what change they thought occurred so that the woman who had avoided public exposure now returned to the village to share her encounter. Group members provided several insights including: she was excited about meeting Jesus: she felt empowered because Jesus spent time talking to her: she no longer felt embarrassed because she had been honest and did not have anything else to hide; and she no longer felt less than other people. These insights suggest the group recognized that the Woman at the Well experienced a transformation of her self-perception.

At the conclusion of the instructional period, each person was given an opportunity to address the person to whom they had written a personal note of affirmation. After sharing, the written notes were given to the individual members as keepsakes. The final class evaluation and post-surveys were completed and returned. Certificates of participation were presented to each person.

Summary of Learning

This project was done using a qualitative method for research and data collection. The project design utilized a qualitative collection method utilizing pre- and post-survey questionnaires, a self-esteem assessment tool, journals and project evaluation tool. The self-assessment tool used was the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale which provided baseline

information on participant's perception of their personal level of self-esteem. Pre-survey and post-survey questions were designed using open-ended questions to ascertain preliminary and post understanding of concepts and terminology used in the instructional classes. The post-survey utilized the same questions as the pre-survey to determine if any change in understanding or new insights were gained during the six-week project. The project evaluation tool was designed to assess perceived effectiveness or deficits of the model.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale provides a means to assess a person's global self-esteem using a four-point scale to assess both positive and negative feelings about self.² Responses to the questions on the Rosenberg Scale are scored as Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (DA).

Figure 1. Rosenberg self-esteem scale

SA = strongly agree A = agree D = disagree SD = strongly disagree

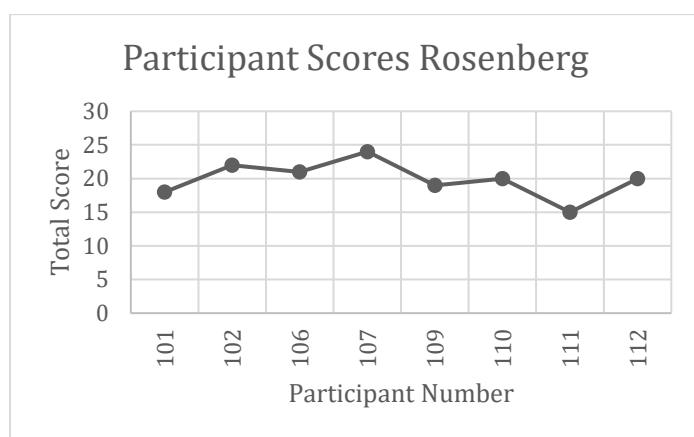
- _____ 1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
- _____ 2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
- _____ 3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. (R)
- _____ 4. I am able to do things as well as most people.
- _____ 5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of. (R)
- _____ 6. I take a positive attitude towards myself.
- _____ 7. On the whole I am satisfied with myself.
- _____ 8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
- _____ 9. I certainly feel useless at times. (R)

² University of Maryland, "Using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale," accessed July 17, 2019, <https://socy.umd.edu/about-us/using-rosenberg-self-esteem-scale>.

_____ 10. At times I think that I am no good at all. (R)

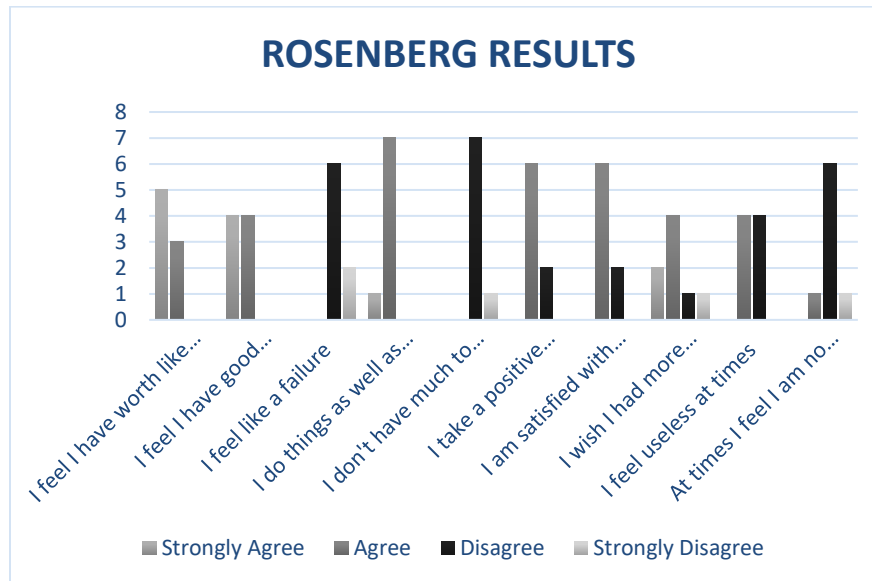
For those items without an (R) next to them, simply add the score. For the items marked with an (R), reverse the scoring (SD = 3, D = 2, A = 1, SA = 0). Add the scores. Typical scores on the Rosenberg scale are around twenty-two, with most people scoring between fifteen and twenty-five.

Figure 2. Individual aggregate scores



All participants were within the range of norms (fifteen to twenty-five) for results. Thirty-seven point five scored on the lower end of the scale with scores ranging between fifteen and eighteen total points while 63.5% scored themselves between twenty to twenty-four points. There were no scores which fell below the established norms which suggested that none of the participants had below average levels of self-esteem. Several scored on the lower end of the rating scale which suggested there was potential for transformation of self-perception through understanding of factors which influence development of self-perception.

Figure 3. Results by question



Responses to questions six, seven, eight, nine and ten provided the most insight into participants perception of worth and value. Question six 25% of participants responded in the negative. Question seven 25% answered they were not satisfied with themselves. Question eight generated 75% of responses in the strongly agree and agree categories for wishing they had greater respect for themselves. These responses suggested to me that most of the participants had some deficit in their perceptions of personal value and worth. Although their overall scores did not reflect a low self-esteem, the inability to respect one's self suggests that there are some deficits in self-perception and worth based on early research done by this author. Question nine 25% answered they did not hold a positive perception of their abilities. Question ten 11.37% or one participant answered at times she felt no good at all.

In analyzing the data by question revealed that although all participant's overall score on the Rosenberg self-esteem assessment was within the typical range, the answers to the individual questions provided greater insight into specific areas where participant's

self-perceptions were diminished. Questions one through five were written to elicit a response about how one felt about oneself in comparison to others. Questions six through ten assessed self-perception and generated the most negative responses. The results suggested to me that the participants were more critical of their worth and ability when not comparing themselves to others but looking at personal character traits.

Eight persons attended the first class and took the pre-survey. The pre-survey questionnaire reflects the responses of the eight who attended however, the post-survey will only reflect the responses of the seven participants who completed the class. All questionnaires were anonymous using an identifier which was given to each participant at the beginning of the class. The following questions and responses were obtained:

What is your definition of Self-Worth?

- 101: Sum total of my talents, gifts and deficits
- 102: Perception of self and ability to be productive to family and community, understanding my purpose
- 106: Knowing yourself and believing in who you are, loving yourself
- 107: How worthy you feel about yourself and your ability
- 109: Feeling good about yourself and feeling accomplished
- 110: How I imagine I'm seen by myself and others
- 111: How I feel about myself and my usefulness
- 112: Ability to accept the things I do with pride

What is your definition of self-efficacy?

- 101: Ability to take care of myself physically, financially and emotionally
- 102: To be effective
- 106: Being true to yourself and being the best person you can

- 107: Understanding who you are, your ability to accomplish task, to talk through concerns and rise above your situation
- 109: Being self-reliant, being able to ask for help
- 110: One's ability to strive high in life
- 111: Ability to get the outcomes I want
- 112: Unsure

What has influenced development of your worth and ability?

- 101: Professional success
- 102: Faith and education
- 106: Taking time for self, developing closer relationship with God
- 107: Supportive family, support system of family and friends
- 109: Being in an accepting relationship where you can be yourself
- 110: Acquiring degrees, knowing I can strive high, connection to family and friends
- 111: Ability to achieve educational goals
- 112: Ability to teach myself how to love me and let others love me

What are some factors which influenced one's perception of self and worth?

- 101: Intelligence, wisdom and common sense, adaptability, positive and negative feedback
- 102: Family, friends, environment, societal
- 106: Likes on social media; compliments; position of power
- 107: Friends, family, failure, skillset, talents
- 109: Color of your skin, weight, family, relationships, parental expectations
- 110: Family, friends, success, accomplishments, community, church

111: Parental messages, praise from teachers, support, images they see and encounter

112: Education, love and respect

Based on your understanding how does faith inform a sense of worth and ability?

101: Knowing God is pleased with me is most affirming thing in my life, but feeling like I failed God is the most crushing

102: Empowers you to feel better about self and situation

106: Learning about God helps to obtain a positive self-worth; have to have faith in self to have positive self-worth

107: Helps a person believe in themselves first then in God as they are being led and directed, should increase knowing God is for you

109: Provides confidence and courage to deal with difficult situations, comfort of knowing you are not alone

110: Reinforces your feeling of being important in the world

111: Influence how hopeful one maybe and tendency to see what is positive in their lives

112: Faith helps you develop a positive outlook on life and self

Do you feel stories of women in the bible influence perception of worth and ability?

101: Yes – without these stories nothing to aspire to or avoid becoming

102: Yes - despite tradition the Bible shows the power of women

106: Yes - Influences in a negative way; not a lot of stories of women are uplifting or portray women as being strong or knowing their worth

107: Yes – show how to overcome situations even when they do not see their worth; how they persevered

109: Yes – similar situations, not much changes

110: Yes and no

111: Yes – especially when the women are named or speak

- 112: Yes - Stories of women in the Bible can be depressing until you learn more and someone helps you see their strength

Signs of low self-worth

- 101: Depressed; despair; ineptitude; clumsiness; lack of focus; close minded; self-hatred
- 102: Tendency to not want to be alone, not willing to participate or be engaged; never volunteers for leadership
- 106: Needs validation; mean spirited; lack of confidence
- 107: Self-doubt; self-destructive; negative outlook on life, depressed, addictive habits, envy, fears change
- 109: The way they present themselves
- 110: Negative, destructive behaviors and thoughts, settle for mundane, little faith in God, family, and friends
- 111: Unkept appearance, lack of willingness to speak, overworked, enabling of others, people pleaser, standoffish, overbearing, aggressive
- 112: Withdrawn, shy, non-speaking, emotional

Signs of Positive self-worth

- 101: Confidence, peace of mind, purposefulness, and courage
- 102: Willingness to become involved
- 106: Loving yourself and others, loving God, being kind to others
- 107: Genuine, accepting of others, encouraging, positive outlook, willing to adapt and be flexible
- 109: Good job, satisfying relationships, living in a great house in good community, children in Ivy league school, being born with good genes
- 110: Positive outlook on life, documented goals and dreams, progressive thoughts and actions, faith that circumstances can change and get better
- 111: Willingness to admit faults, practice self-care, willing to assume leadership, ability to say 'no', able to focus on others without losing self

112: Happiness

Do you believe self-worth influences willingness to lead?

101: Yes – self-worth makes a difference between stepping up and being drafted. Influences amount and quality of effort put into reaching the goal

102: Yes- leaders are self-confident, must feel good about yourself to be effective with others

106: Yes – positive self-worth gives you confidence to lead; more inclined to step up

107: Yes – without it would feel like not good enough; positive self-worth more willing to step out of comfort zone

109: Yes – positive self-worth gives you confidence to lead

110: Yes – aides in your sense of confidence to lead

111: Yes – without self-worth I would never offer myself to leadership

112: Yes – more likely to be willing

Reasons for hesitancy to assume leadership

101: Fear of failure or rejection, lack of confidence, fear of success

102: Lack of knowledge of subject, diminished self-esteem, fearful no one will follow, fear of failure, do not want to be responsible

106: Fear, lack of confidence, low self-worth, afraid of being judged or embarrassed

107: Fear of embarrassment, unsure, fear failure, people will not follow, shy, poor communication skills, never done it before

109: Fear of criticism, fear of not being liked, too much work, do not want to be in charge of others

110: Scared of change, unknown, fear to move from comfort zone, misperception of leadership, afraid of what others say or think, unsure of personal ability

111: If I offer once I have to continue, I have nothing to offer, not capable, women do not do that, do not want the attention

112: Experience, appearance, education, low self-esteem

The pre-survey data indicated that overall, participants had a basic conceptual understanding of self-worth, factors which influence development of self-perception and signs of positive and negative self-worth. However, the responses of approximately half of the participants indicated they lacked a clear understanding of self-efficacy. There was consensus that faith and stories of women in the Bible play a key role in development of self-perception. Additionally, the data indicated general understanding of the relationship between self-perception and willingness to assume leadership.

One participant (101) did not return after the first class therefore, the post-survey results include only the seven participants who completed the class. Post-survey questions were identical to the pre-survey questions, to assess for any change in knowledge or understanding of the subject occurred over the five weeks of instruction and learning. The following are the responses to the post-survey:

What is your definition of Self-Worth?

102: How I value myself, how I assess my worthiness as a human being

106: Self-worth is something only God can give you

107: The feeling that you as a person have worth; you have value as a person

109: Believing in yourself and that you can do whatever you want in life

110: How one see's and values themselves

111: Understanding that 100% of me is valuable 100% of the time
because of being created in God's image

112: Worthy to be myself and expect good things because God made me

What is your definition of self-efficacy?

- 102: My belief in my capabilities to accomplish designated goals and perform successfully
- 106: Knowing you do some things well but if someone else does something you do not do well your self-worth is not diminished
- 107: The belief that you can do something and the ability to reach your goals
- 109: Belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or tasks
- 110: One's ability to know they can achieve goals and outcomes
- 111: Belief that I am able to complete a task or achieve a goal and the confidence I have in myself to do it
- 112: My ability to motivate myself and be confident in what I say and do

What has influenced development of your worth and ability?

- 102: My faith in my ability to perform, my willingness to 'study to show myself approved' (my education) my faith in God, God did not make junk
- 106: I think going back to God created me in his image. That has been one of the most influential factors.
- 107: My family encouraging me, instilling in me that I have value and I can do anything I set my mind to
- 109: To know what I want and to just say 'no' when I do not care to do something if it doesn't work for me
- 110: Taking ownership of knowing what your worth is and how you can further develop it.
- 111: The examples set before me which have been accompanied by an expectation that I would follow in those footsteps.
- 112: The birth of my children and completion of my bachelor and master course work.

What are some factors which influence one's perception of self and worth?

- 102: Opinions of others; education or lack of; material things; accomplishments; money or lack of

- 106: Other's opinions; validation from others
- 107: Family, employment, friends, success, failures, and society
- 109: Family, spouse, and teachers
- 110: Encouragement, family, friends, support systems
- 111: Messages from important people in my life (parents, friends, teachers, co-workers, relatives); continuous messages from media; what one observes as worth and ability in those around them; what is encountered in entertainment, culturally accepted ideas
- 112: Education, family, church, job, and income

Based on your understanding how does faith inform a sense of worth and ability

- 102: All created in God's image; we are divinely created with purpose and gifts; my faith says I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me; God loves me just as I am.
- 106: Having faith that God created us and knowing that God did not make any mistakes when we were formed.
- 107: Faith should give a person a sense of worth and ability, strengthens your thinking towards the positive helps you resist negative thinking
- 109: Your faith allows you to put your faith in God and believe in the plan God has mapped out for you.
- 110: Faith is a sound board and source of validation
- 111: Faith informs the larger context of one's worth and ability; puts who we are in conversation with who God is; puts positive light on worth and ability because God is good and love and since we are created in God's image we are good, worthy and loved.
- 112: Strong faith helps you become worthy and improves your ability to do what God has put in your heart

Do you feel stories of women in the Bible influence perception of worth and ability?

- 102: Yes – I truly feel the bible honors women. I think women get hung up on the culture of how things were and fail to see the greatness of how God truly values us as women.
- 106: Yes – there are stories where women examine their self-worth and some where they do not seem to be aware of their self-worth.
- 107: Yes – they give examples of positive and negative self-worth and ability.
- 109: No – From what I learned I feel women in the Bible had to stay in their place because it was a man's world. Not all did but it seems like the majority did.
- 110: Yes – Shows relatable perceptions of what they did and how they developed in other environments
- 111: Yes – they remind us we are not alone in our struggles and that the issues women face today are as old as time. Provides examples of how women survived and overcame but most importantly how their faith sustained them. Endured when patriarchal and paternalistic ideas of womanhood were more stringent and yet they did more than survived. I find them inspiring.
- 112: Yes

Signs of low self-worth

- 102: Lack of self-confidence, negative thoughts about yourself, feelings of worthlessness and defeat, and social withdrawal
- 106: Abuse, bad talking to yourself, comparing yourself to others, not trusting God
- 107: Unhealthy relationships, unhappy, always searching, treating themselves poorly
- 109: No eye contact, not speaking up for yourself, fear that you are not worthy based on someone else's opinion
- 110: Doubting, negative thoughts and perceptions, believing what others think about you
- 111: Inability to take care of yourself, unwillingness to invest in self-care, surrounding self with those who do not value you, enables others
- 112: Withdrawal, drug abuse, and violence

Signs of Positive self-worth

- 102: Ability to live in the present, not influenced by the opinions of others, valuing yourself, not being hard on self for making mistakes, knowing bad choices do not define you, accept challenges and take risks in order to grow
- 106: Loving yourself, knowing God did not make a mistake with you, speaking positive things to yourself
- 107: Loving towards others, compassionate, being the best they can be
- 109: Getting out of your comfort zone and daring to be different regardless of what people think
- 110: Confidence, valuing your own opinion, open to new ideas and points of view
- 111: Willing to take calculated risks, tendency to lead, self-care evident physically, verbally and relationally
- 112: Friendliness, happiness

Do you believe self-worth influences willingness to lead?

- 102: Yes – if you have low self-esteem or worth less likely to take on leadership roles; feel inadequate and would not try if you do not think you can reach the goal. High self-esteem will accept challenges knowing they do not have to be perfect.
- 106: Yes – I believe if people see themselves as worthy or have a positive self-worth, they will have the confidence to lead
- 107: Yes – knowing that they are worthy provides confidence; despite apprehension will be more likely to try
- 109: Yes – because leaders lead by example and are confident
- 110: Yes – When a person knows who they are and the value they possess they are more likely to step into the spotlight
- 111: Yes- determines one's belief in whether they have anything valuable to offer others in their leadership. Affects confidence in one's ability to be successful and whether they can help or deter others in success

- 112: Yes – absolutely people who feel good about themselves are usually leaders

Reasons for hesitancy to assume leadership

- 102: Afraid of disapproval, afraid of failure, cannot take constructive criticism
- 106: Feeling unworthy, unsure, afraid of what people may think or say
- 107: Fear they will not lead like others, unsure of what to do, feel unqualified, personal insecurities, and fear of failure
- 109: Fear of being ridiculed, too much work, lack of confidence
- 110: Fear, unsure, not sure how they will be seen, liked or understood
- 111: Low self-efficacy, low self-worth, low self-esteem, fear, procrastination,
- 112: Being judged, low self-esteem, lack of participation

In analyzing the post-survey responses, it was revealed that overall the responses to questions which asked participants to list signs of positive or low self-worth, factors influencing willingness to lead and factors which influence development of self-worth showed little change and remained relatively consistent with the pre-survey responses. There were several areas however, which suggested that there had been a change in understanding of certain concepts presented. The variance in definitions of self-worth between the pre-and post-surveys indicated a shift from viewing self-worth as synonymous with efficacy to an understanding of worth as a person's inherent value as a human being created by God and in God's image. The responses also indicated an enhanced understanding of the concept of self-efficacy as it relates to ability to set, accomplish and move towards goals. The pre-survey responses to the question of how faith informs worth implied that faith was primarily a source of strength to help in development of worth. Whereas, post-survey responses did not reference strength rather

suggested that centering of identity in God was foundational to development of positive worth and value.

Participants were also asked to journal their reflections from each week's class. After week two, they were asked to write a brief spiritual autobiography. The journals were collected after completion of week three and it was found that only two of the participants were regularly journaling their reflections and only one attempted to write a spiritual autobiography. The journals were being used to record their weekly scripture reflection, for taking notes during the instructional periods and to complete the post-class assignments. Journals were returned at the beginning of week four and participants were asked why they were not journaling. Answers included I did not have time. I knew you would read them. The journals did not provide any useful data for this project.

A post-course evaluation was done to assess the benefits and effectiveness of the class. The questions and responses to the evaluation are:

Has perception of your personal worth and ability changed through participating in this project?

- 102: Yes, came to realize that I do not have to be perfect. I do not have to worry what others think just live my life according to God's purpose and will.
- 106: Yes. I have often been seeking validation from others. I know now that I cannot seek that from outside, that my self-worth comes from God.
- 107: Absolutely
- 109: Yes, I feel more confident about my abilities, understanding that God has put within me all that I need. I am worthy because God says I am worthy. Now I have to walk in it.
- 110: Yes, my perception has changed. I learned that you can never stop growing. Your worth and ability will always continue to evolve.
- 111: Yes, it has improved.

112: Yes, Yes, Yes, I now understand that I am worthy because I am loved by God.

Has your perception of your ability to lead changed through participating in this project?

102: Yes – I am more willing to lead in prayer.

106: Yes, we just talked about everyone in this class is capable of leading. I think some time I do not have the confidence which hinders me from leading.

107: Most definitely

109: Yes, I know that in my leadership I am learning as well as leading, it is a continual process.

110: Yes, I do not fear leading “as much” anymore because I am focusing more on my worth and how I can become more effective.

111: Yes

112: Yes, my perception of my ability to lead is better. Where I failed in the past was to include God in my leadership role.

Do you believe you would be more willing to assume a leadership role after completion of this project?

102: Yes

106: Yes, I have the tools now to begin to combat negative thinking and develop more confidence in myself to take on a leadership role.

107: Yes

109: Yes, I can see leading in other areas within the church and ministry

110: Yes, I believe I would. I already take on a few responsibilities, so I am open to evolve in these or other roles.

111: Yes, I have more confidence.

112: Maybe yes?

During this process what was of most benefit to you?

- 102: The historical perspective of women as second-class citizens and the tradition that follows some women who feel incapable of leading or speaking their truths. Knowing that even in biblical times there were women who stood up against tradition. Knowing that God values women. The journaling was very beneficial.
- 106: I think the meditations and the open discussions were most beneficial. Being able to hear other's perspectives on certain topics, helped me gain more insight and understanding. The meditations helped me to go deeper in the word.
- 107: Getting to know myself better and to know that I am truly not alone because God is always with me.
- 109: Meditating on scripture; summarizing the weekly lessons the next week gave a clearer picture of the topic and allowed me to apply it to my life.
- 110: The meditation portion which assisted me in reading verses and opening my mind to how it appealed and applied to me.
- 111: Affirmation of my self-efficacy and accepting the results of my leadership on others. Seeing myself in the different biblical characters helped to facilitate the process. Learning about the way black women worked against the negative images.
- 112: The ability to process and understand that I can be me and not worry about what other's think. Understanding the way women (black women) have been portrayed how it has affected us

What was the least beneficial?

- 102: There was not any part of this journey that was not beneficial.
- 106: Nothing
- 107: I cannot complain about anything
- 109: Nothing
- 110: N/A
- 111: The one-word evaluation at the end of each class asking me for the one word which described how I felt at the end of the session.
- 112: Everything was beneficial.

What improvements can be made to make this class more effective?

- 102: I enjoyed the classes and would like to see maybe a more detailed component leadership workshop on how to build self-esteem and effective communication skills.
- 106: I thought the class was great. Maybe doing smaller groups during the discussion time or even some one on one discussions would have been good too.
- 107: To make this an ongoing class or workshop
- 109: Since we were focusing on leading possibly have each person lead a lesson
- 110: I do not think there needs to be any improvements made to this class. It was awesome!
- 111: The location, the fellowship hall was too large, a cozier atmosphere may help folks feel more comfortable and share more freely.
- 112: Video showing me what a self-worth individual or someone experiencing high/low self-esteem looks like. Maybe have some role-playing.

What did you learn through this process?

- 102: The importance of self-love, loving who you are and who God created you to be. Your gift is for you and you do not have to compare it against anyone else's.
- 106: I learned a lot about self-worth and self-efficacy. I learned that no one can define your worth but God. This has been empowering.
- 107: To be myself, to love myself and not worry so much about what others say about me.
- 109: That it is ok to make mistakes, learn from them and move on; it's ok because God loves me just as I am, mistakes and all.
- 110: I learned that taking time to focus on your self-worth and abilities helps us to grow and find value in ourselves. Never stop believing, dreaming, and leading (w/o Fear)!
- 111: We all start at different places, but we can still learn at the same pace and from each other on the journey to positive self-esteem, worth and efficacy.

112: I learned that I am enough, and God loves me as I am.

The post course evaluation responses support the thesis of the benefit of using a small group teaching model for personal transformation. One hundred percent of participants responded that their perception of their leadership ability had changed. Six of the seven responded that after participating in the course, they would be more willing to assume a position of leadership within the church. Although the evaluations were overall positive, they also provided valuable suggestions for ways to improve the class and the experience for the participants. The evaluation showed that each participant expressed a willingness to consider a leadership position in the church.

Conclusion

The author believes that this project proved that perceptions of self-worth and self-efficacy must be considered when evaluating a person's willingness or reticence to assume leadership roles within the church. When people do not feel good about themselves or their ability to be successful and accomplish goals, they are less likely to assume leadership positions. Recruiting women to assume leadership roles at Ward Chapel AME Church has been difficult because many expressed feelings of inadequacy to lead. This project demonstrated that through understanding of factors influencing the development of positive self-worth and efficacy women were less reticent to consider assuming leadership positions in the church. The project demonstrated that a model to explore, identify and address issues of self-worth and efficacy as related to willingness to assume leadership facilitates transformation of perceptions about personal ability to lead.

The data from the pre and post-surveys, and class discussions prove the effectiveness of mutually respectful small group learning environments, in which women can be vulnerable, transparent and supported, as vehicles for transformation. The “Why Not Me” model demonstrated that understanding the biblical, historical and societal influencers on development of positive self-worth had a positive effect on the participant’s self-perception. Participants expressed that the ability to learn and listen to the reflections and personal stories of others was beneficial to helping them to express feelings and fears without judgement or recrimination. Participants expressed during the concluding session that as African American women much of the historical and societal information shared was familiar however, placing it in the context of development of self-worth and self-efficacy provided valuable insight.

The class evaluation of the project provided valuable insight into areas for improvement in the data collection process. Based on class outcomes the author believes it would be beneficial to administer the Rosenberg Self-Esteem tool at both the beginning and end of the project to evaluate any change in level of self-esteem. The questions on the pre and post-survey need to be revised to reduce redundancy and to elicit more concise responses. More time should be allocated to instructing participants on the purpose and value of journaling. The length of the class created some limitations where an eight-week class would allow for greater exploration of each of the subject areas.

This author believes that the “Why Not Me” model is a viable tool for helping women, particularly African American women, to better understand their reticence to leadership. As demographics in churches continue to change the need for women to assume leadership increases. The church must have ways to assist women who do not

perceive themselves as leaders to embrace their worth and efficacy as those created in the image of God and capable of assuming leadership within the church and society.

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